Three Little Maids

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"'There they are,' Phyl said, in a tremulous voice." (Page 17.)

Three Little Maids

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'SEVEN LITTLE AUSTRALIANS,' 'THE LITTLE LARRIKIN,' 'THE CAMP AT WANDINONG,' ETC.

"O to be young again!
O to have dreams and dreams!
And to talk in the gardens of Wonderland
With stars and flowers and streams!"

W. A. MacKenzie.

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TO

MY TINY DAUGHTER

Here is a chain for you, sweet,
  Hold up your soft hands to catch it;
Pansy and white marguerite,
  You will think nothing can match it.

But you will say, Are they true?
  All of the flowers in the chain, dear?
Did they all grow up with you,
  Or some of them just in your brain, dear?

Count true the white marguerite,
  Pansies—as false I must own them.
Life, it may well be, my sweet,
  Had not so fair to you grown them.

E. S. C.
Mosman's Bay
Sydney

2200594

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PART 1

PLAY DAYS

Three Little Maids

CHAPTER I

TWELVE O' THE CLOCK

"What's done cannot be undone ; to bed, to bed, to bed."

THERE was the listening hush of midnight in the house. No light burned in any of the rooms, but through the windows, where the blinds were up, a woe-begone struggling moon shone palely.

The big bedroom at the front of the house was empty, and the moonbeams lay quiet on the smooth white counterpane of the canopied bed. Even in so faint a light it was plain to see the room was unused ; the chairs and sofa held no heaps of flung-off clothes, the dressing-table appointments were in the most precise order, the chill air lay over everything, unbroken by the regular fall and rise of human breath.

The mother had taken the visitors' room to sleep in ever since the day two months ago when Death had

walked whitely into that larger room and frozen with his strange breath the father of her youngest child.

The moon touched sadly now the face that lay in the smaller room, in that strangest of places wandered to by mortals—perfect dreamlessness.

Brown waves of hair strayed on the pillow, brown eyelashes lay motionless on cheeks where the lifeless tinge of grief knew itself for stranger, and was slowly giving way once more to the healthy life-colour that loved to dwell there. The contour of the face was at once grave and childish; an irresponsible flower-life of happiness would have accentuated certain lines about the nostrils and mouth into a look of spirited wilfulness, but the hard climbing of hills had been given to her instead, and the mouth at eight-and-twenty was wholesomely self-reliant.

Her youngest child, Weenie, was curled up beside her, a dark-haired morsel of four.

Across the landing, but rather lower down, was a third bedroom with a very tossed bed, where two little light-haired girls lay, their arms flung across each other, their curls tangled in the same heap.

From under the pillow of each peeped a book, but there were restrictions against reading in bed at night, and in the morning at eight and ten years old one is always so ready to get up that the volumes were merely put there for company. Against the wall stood a row of four dolls' beds crowded with occupants, and, a little apart, a fifth one, quite empty.

The book of the younger girl, Dorothy, slipped from the pillow and made a hard ridge for her neck to lie on. She turned restlessly for a minute or two, and tossed her head about, but the hardness did not move, and she woke drowsily. Her slumber had been uneasy, like her sister's, most of the night, and the waking instantly brought a dull sense of a certain trouble in life. By the time she had blinked twice, recollection had come and she sat up, gently disengaging herself from the thin little arm across her chest, and gazed, all her heart in her eyes, at the empty miniature bed a moonbeam faintly discovered.

Then her gaze went to the windows, where the blinds were always left high up, that none of the sun's first merry darts might be lost.

"Oh," she said with a sudden gasp, horror in her eyes, "Phyl, Phyl, wake up at once." She shook her hastily. Phyl's face had almost a spiritual look in this faint light, so thin it was, so drained of colour the cheeks and lips.

"Whatever's the matter?" she said, the impatience of a spoiled dreamland upon her.

"It's *snowing*," said Dorothy, in a voice fraught with intensest emotion.

Phyl rolled comfortably over to her left side without the least unclosing of her heavy eyelids.

"Well, I don't care," she said, drowsily.

Dorothy shook her vigorously to bring her to reason. She was quite quivering with cold and grief

herself. "Don't you remember?" she said. "Jennie and Suey are out all this time."

Then indeed Phyl's eyes sprang open, and the horror in her sister's eyes showed equally strong in her own.

"Whatever shall we do?" she said.

They crept out of bed softly and stole through cold air to the window against which the little soft flakes were beginning to fall.

"H'sh!" Dorothy said, "we shall wake mother." So they tiptoed and spoke in whispers.

Phyl was peering in an anguished way through a patch of glass she had rubbed clear of breath-mist, but the moon was growing more and more woe-begone now the snow-clouds were drifting down, and all it revealed of the garden were some vague shadows of trees and stretches of dark grass patched here and there with white.

"They'll get galloping consumption at least," Dorothy said in a choked voice.

Phyl drew a deep breath and moved to one of the chairs where their clothes lay neatly folded.

"I'm going to fetch Suey in," she said.

"Oh," gasped Dolly, whose mind had not travelled quite so far as this.

Phyl was slipping some petticoats on over her nightgown; she groped about and found one shoe and one boot for her feet.

"Are you coming?" she said. "P'raps you don't care."

Dorothy stumbled to her own chair and put on a garment or two.

"I care more than you," she said in a fierce whisper; "I've kept waking and waking all night, and you just went on being asleep."

"That's all *you* know," Phyl said. "Why, I've been

They'll get galloping consumption at least."

awake hours and hours, and all this time you were fast asleep. I don't believe you were awake more than a minute."

"Every time I was awake you were asleep, 'cause I heard you talking silly things," said Dorothy indignantly.

"Every time I was awake you had your eyes screwed up fast, so you must have been asleep," contended Phyl.

Dorothy was summoning a fresh argument, but Phyl's tender thoughts fled out into the snow.

"*Think* how they'll be shivering!" she said. "Come on, Dolly."

They dragged the eider-down quilt off the bed, doubled it, and wrapped it round the shoulders of both of them, for they were quite alive to the cold. Then they stumbled off softly and awkwardly, thus pinioned together, along the passage, down the dark, still stairs, and to the side-door in the hall.

It was Phyl's cold little hand that softly undid the bolt, while Dorothy, with impartial justice, held the wrap round the two pairs of shoulders. They crept down the steps, their loose shoes crushing the fresh-fallen snow in a way that alarmed them for a moment lest the house should be aroused. But then the keen mysterious terrors of the white-patched darkness assailed them and made them callous to all other fears.

What was that eerie-looking thing crouched there by the porch? Phyl whispered, in a would-be stout voice, that it was only a great heap of leaves old John had swept up; but both of them felt in their hearts it was pregnant with horrible spirit life. And that mournful sigh and whistle that came from among the bare-armed trees of the shrubbery? Dorothy *said* it

was only the wind, but the saying in no wise reassured either of them. They stopped and clung in terror to each other half-a-dozen times before they reached the spot for which they were bound—the bottom of the kitchen garden. Light feathery flakes lay on their hair, their breath congealed as it came from their blue lips, their teeth chattered loosely.

And yet none of these things quite killed the romance for them. Phyl even stood still one dreadful half-second.

"This really ought to have been part of their adventure; we oughtn't to rescue them so soon," she said gloomily, "it would have been an experience."

But Dolly's heart was bleeding, and she dragged on so determinedly that the other half of the quilt was forced to follow.

"Oh," she said in a most poignant tone of grief, "they *can't* go on having expewiences when it's snowing, Phyl."

Where the cabbages ended a row of rhubarb-plants divided the vegetables from the gooseberry-bushes. Beyond these was a rough bank covered with prickly bush, and beyond that again was a wild heap of quarried stone left from some repairing that had recently been done to the house.

"There they are," Phyl said in a tremulous voice.

On the roughest ledge of stone, exposed to all the wind and weather, lay two dolls. The little girls' hands went to them, never a moment confused as to

which belonged to which, and drew them with passionate thankfulness into the eider-down shelter.

"Suey's soaking," said Phyl, bitter reproach in her voice.

"Jennie's dying, I think," said Dorothy, with a great sob.

They wound the cumbersome quilt round the four of them and scuttled back to the house. Up-stairs again they crept, their boots in their hands, and their frozen feet bare to the bitter cold that crept about the floors. But how happy were their hearts now their darlings were safe in their arms!

"I think I'll just light the candle," Phyl said, "we can't see how they look in the dark."

She struck a match very very softly, and the pale light illuminated the room.

Dorothy was stripping off Jennie's dripping frock as she sat on the edge of the bed. "We'll have to wrap them in towels," she said, "their night-gowns are in the nursery."

So they seized a towel each and enveloped the saw-dust bodies tenderly. It was agreed to be impossible to put them in the little bed against the wall after such an eventful night, so were snuggled down in their own bed, into which they crept once more.

"Ugh, how wet your hair is!" Dolly said, as Phyl's damp light curls brushed her face again.

Then she sat up in dismay.

"You oughtn't to have gone, Phyl," she said;

"you'll go and get another cold, and have to stay in bed."

Phyl recollected her troublesome chest for the first time.

"Oh, I'll dry my head and then I'll be all right," she said easily, and gave her hair a rub or two with the towel, that acted—both before and after the operation —as Suey's night-gown.

But Dorcthy was feeling still disturbed, for had she not promised her mother to help to look after this delicate Phyl and keep her from danger? She slipped out of bed once more, and went to the mantel-piece where stood the bottle of cod-liver oil, with which they had built Phyl up after her last attack.

"I *won't*," Phyl said, in a stormy whisper as the nauseous bottle was thrust before her.

"Oh, go on," said Dorothy, "you'll have a fwightful cold if you don't, and wemember how fwitened mama gets."

Phil "wemembered," and struggled nobly with herself. All her soul rose against taking the slimy, ill-looking stuff, but her heart went out to the poor mother, whose colour died and whose sweet mouth trembled at each fresh attack of hers.

"I can't take it without a spoon," she said in a piteous way.

"Here's a doll's plate," said Dolly, "I'll pour some on it and you can lick it off."

Phyl groaned, but Dolly held the tiny plate close to her mouth.

"Do wemember mama," she adjured her.

So Phyl thrust out her shrinking tongue, licked the plate tolerably clean, and with much shuddering lay down again.

CHAPTER II

PRETENDING

"Far away and yet so near us, lies a land where all have been,
Played beside its sparkling waters, danced along its meadows green,
Where the busy world we live in, and its noises only seem
Like the echo of a tempest, or the shadow of a dream."

ALL the other dolls belonging to the pair led quiet, domestic lives, into whose annals few things more eventful came than tea-parties, christenings, funerals, and attacks of galloping consumption or heart disease.

But Jennie and Suey, the two longest owned and most deeply cherished, were called upon to enact every possible and impossible phase of the romance with which the souls of those two little maids were bitten through and through.

Both of the waxen creatures were of pallid complexion; their hair was thin, their noses were worn down by the vicissitudes of years. Sometimes they might be met clad in blue cashmere frocks, with white muslin pinafores, shoes, stockings, and even a micro-

scopic handkerchief apiece. And it might then be known they were passing through a calm period of existence, and were simply the daughters of the pair, or such mild and admired characters from books as Ellen Montgomery or Alice Humphreys.

But if you came across their attenuated forms swathed merely in pieces of black velvet or crimson cashmere, you would know—that is, if the scales could fall from your eyes, and the eager, wonderful second-sight of under twelve be yours for half-an-hour—that all domesticity had passed away and heroines lay before you.

Perhaps Virginia, walking blindly and happily to her lurid death, or Flora Macdonald struggling through dangers to save her king, or glorious Mary bowing her doomed head, or Lammermuir's bride, or Constance following Marmion to the wars.

There was hardly an adventure of hero and heroine of all the strange miscellany of books devoured by the little pair that those unemotional little dolls had not been through.

They had been lowered by knotted handkerchiefs from the highest windows in the house, both as princesses running away with fairy princes, and as heroines escaping from burning hotels. They had had their internal sawdust badly congested by being forced to swim across the narrow ditch of water that ran below the currant-bushes and formed an enchanted castle's moat. They had been hanged by the neck,

shut up in a disused bird-cage called the Bastille, buried up to their necks, plants for a Nero's eyes to gaze upon, placed in an arena to meet with fortitude the Christian martyr's death from ravening lions.

But hitherto, when eight o'clock came, Romance's wings had always fallen to, and fingers, merely loving and maternal now, had soothed and comforted the racked bodies, clad them in night-gowns of most patient work, and laid them to rest in the most elaborate and comfortable of all the little beds.

This was the first night that when bedtime came Romance was still soaring irresistibly. All the afternoon Joan of Arc and Grace Darling had been making their way with unheard-of difficulties from the mines of Siberia to St. Petersburg, to beg an audience of the Czar, in order to rescue their aged parents from the life of toil.

When the tea-bell rang Dorothy picked Jennie up from the salt mine in which she had taken refuge for an hour.

"Let's ask if we may have waspberry jam for tea, Phyl," she said, tucking her heroine under her arm.

But Phyl's eyes still held the fire and glory of the struggle.

"I'll tell you," she said; "let's leave them here on this mountain till bedtime—they never get any *real* adventures; Grace and Joan didn't go in and sit by the nursery fire as soon as the tea-bell went."

"O-oh," said Dolly, clasping her dear one jealously.

It was all very well to have adventures when they themselves were actually on the spot to see no real harm befell, but it seemed a horrible thing to go and leave them unprotected, out-of-doors at night. "O-oh, Phyl,—I wouldn't like to leave Jennie where I couldn't see her."

"Grace's and Joan's mothers couldn't see them," Phyl said darkly.

"It might be wet," said Dorothy, with an anxious look at the sky.

"No; it's beautifully fine," said Phyl; "at any rate Joan is going to stay and brave it; p'raps Grace hasn't got enough pluck, though."

"Gwace is a lot bwaver than Joan," protested Dolly, quickly fired. She sprang across to the stones and laid her down recklessly. Phyl placed Joan in an equally exposed position, and then with determined faces but anxious hearts they ran in to tea, and left the heroines to struggle on across Russia in the dark.

When bedtime came Dolly was ready to slip out and bring them in after the long three hours.

But Phyl's eyes were full of exaltation, and drew her sister away from Weenie, who tried thirstily to hear the whisper.

"Let's let it be a really truly adventure this time," she said; "let's let them go on struggling there till morning."

Dolly's heart swelled.

"They'd get dreadful colds, Phyl," she pleaded, "and Jennie's only just getting over her menumia."

"Oh!" said Phyl impatiently, "heroines can't think about colds and things,—I've decided to let Joan stay,—your cowardly little Grace Darling can come to bed if she likes."

Of course she did not like, and the result was both small maidens crept unhappily into bed, and after long and wistful gazing at the window dropped off at last into troubled sleep.

But who could wake and find it snowing,—an undreamed-of thing that fine night,—and still leave two unfortunate heroines making their harrowing way across the Steppes? There was no thought of Grace in Dolly's mind and none of Joan in Phyl's in that midnight hour; it was little Jennie and Suey who lay beneath the bitter sky, and their instantaneous rescue had to be effected at all costs.

But who could marvel that, even despite the cod-liver oil, Phyllis awoke with laboured breathing, and even strong, rosy Dolly sneezed and sneezed as she slipped on her clothes in the morning to run and tell her mother the sorrowful news that Phyl's Old Man of the Sea was sitting on her chest?

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried the mother, when after much questioning all the story of the night was extracted. "What *am* I going to do with you? Phyl, Phyl, are you trying to break my heart again? Dolly, and you promised to help me!"

"We didn't think," sobbed the little girls, heart-broken themselves to have given such trouble.

"But you never do," said the distracted young mother. "All these dreadful, dreadful things that come into your heads,—you always do them first, and then are sorry after."

"If only you had forbidden us to do it," wept Phyl; "we never do the things you forbid, do we, mother?"

The mother was forced to admit this; their obedience to direct command was unswerving, but how could any one circumvent wild proceedings by laying an embargo on them before the wild young minds had conceived them?

"How could I have dreamed you would do anything so mad?" she said. "Didn't you stay one moment to think how it would grieve me?"

"When we got back we did," said Dolly, with streaming eyes, "and Phyl ate ever so much cod-liver oil to please you."

What was there to be done but scold and scold, and then beg and entreat future carefulness?

"Write it down in the book, Dolly," Phyl said, when the mother had gone off to see about linseed poultices and hot drinks.

And Dolly got out a little book made of bits of paper stitched together by themselves, and she made one new entry on the list of "Things we're not to do on any account."

"Not to go out in the garden when it's snowing in

middle of the night," she wrote now in large plain letters.

The prohibitions on the preceding page or two were a little curious.

"Not to read any more of Sarah's and Jane's books in paper covers."

"Phyl not to get her feet wet in the ditch, and D. not to let her get them wet."

"Not to tie Weenie to the table any more when she touches our things. N.B.—Weenie not to touch our things."

"Not to pretend we're angels going up and down Jacob's ladder."

"Not to pretend Suey is Jael, and not to hammer nails in the table."

"Not to pretend Bibel stories any more at all."

"P. not to pretend Sarah is Sinbad when she is washing the floor, and never to get on her back again."

"D. not to give her best books to poor girls at the door any more."

"What 'll we be to-day?" Dolly said, tucking the book of prohibitions in a secret place between the skirting-board and the wall. "Tell you, I'll be Snow-White and you can be Rose-Red."

Phyl considered.

"Well, out of the blue book," she said. "The green with twirly letters is stupid."

The blue held Andersen's versions, all other at-

tempts to disguise or dress up this immortal story being swiftly resented by the two.

Phyl was at a disadvantage, being confined to a prostrate position, and could only make passes in the air, but Dolly moved about the room in a slow, queer way, her arms outstretched and waving regularly.

At any hour of the day the two might be seen moving about the house or garden in the same mysterious fashion, their arms tossing gently, their eyes dreamy. But if they met any one their arms dropped guiltily to their sides and their faces grew very red; to no one, not even their mother, would they have confessed that they were fairies floating about the earth.

Rose-Red, with a blissful smile on her face, was in the midst of a conversation with the Prince when the steaming linseed poultice came to interrupt.

"You must keep your arms under the blankets," the mother said, tucking the clothes well in.

"Oh, mother!" was Phyl's dismayed answer.

"Wouldn't it do if you tied some flannel round each arm?" said Dolly anxiously.—How *was* a fairy to "float" and be "wafted airily," or to "rustle musically," with her arms smothered in bed-clothes?

"No," said Mrs. Conway very decisively, "until the fire burns up much better Phyl is to keep the clothes—faithfully—up to her chin. Remember, I trust you, Phyl. Now I am going to see about your tray."

"Oh!" began Dorothy with beseeching eyes.

The mother laughed resignedly.

"I suppose I must say yes," she said, and went down to see that the tray was laid for two bedroom breakfasts. She had long since found the only way to induce Phyl to eat anything when she was ill was to allow Dolly to have her meals with her.

Harriet came up with the two pink bowls of bread-and-milk.

"Serve you well right, Miss Phyl," she said; "real bad girls, that's what you are! And people thinking you're so good. Do you know what Jane's mother said when she first saw you?"

"No," they answered, but they looked nervous; they were both very sensitive to anything said about them.

"She sez to me, she sez, 'What nice quiet little ladies yours look, Harriet! They'd never give you any trouble, I'm sure,' she sez. An' do you know what I sez to her?"

"No," they said again, meekly.

"I sez, 'Don't you go judging by aperyances, Mrs. Barnes. For all they look so quiet, they're real downright bad,' I sez. An' so you are."

They accepted the statement with a certain amount of relief, for they had both secretly feared it was a worse charge that Mrs. Barnes had brought against them. They would far rather have been termed "bad" than "silly" or "romantic."

"What dishes have the minions set before us?" said Phyl as the door shut behind the hard speaker-of-truth.

"There are woc's eggs, haunches of venison, pweserved woses, and almond toffee," responded Dolly.

"Then let us anon," said Phyl. "Anon" was the last word that had struck her fancy, and she dragged it into her conversation in all possible and impossible places.

They had just emptied their heavy gold plates and laid down their spoons, the handles of which were encrusted with priceless diamonds, when the mother came in with another tray bearing cocoa, bread-and-butter, and boiled eggs. Weenie followed with the salt, and a look of envy on her face.

"I never det any colds," she said forlornly.

After breakfast, when the tray had been taken away and the mother had gone to her various duties, Dolly looked at Phyl, and Phyl looked at Dolly, and then they both looked at Weenie.

"Oh," the small one said entreatingly, very quick to interpret the glances, "do let's stay, Phyl—*please*, Dolly, let's stay."

Phyl looked at her impatiently. "Don't begin to be tiresome, Weenie," she said; "you're not nearly old enough for this game. Think how nice it will be to have the nursery to yourself all day."

"We'll lend you the pink tea-set if you'll be very careful with it," Dolly added consolingly.

But Weenie seemed entirely to fail to see the advantage of the sole use of the nursery, even with the pink tea-set—which was not the very best one—thrown in.

"I *will* stay," she said. "I shall stay. I will stay —I will stay." She wound her arms round the bedpost to prevent the forcible ejection that so often overtook her.

"Take no notice of her," whispered Dolly, "she'll soon get tired of it and go."

They commenced waving their arms and talking in that strange tongue of theirs again.

Within the space of ten minutes Dolly had been rescued from an enchanted castle; turned into a swan to elude the pursuit of a wicked step-mother; had danced at a ball on the waters of the lake, clad in a garment made of sunset clouds studded with dewdrops; and now, seated on a magnificent throne hewn out of a block of priceless jasper, arrayed in royal purple robes sparkling with diamonds, she was a princess once more restored to her own rights, and was extending a fairy-like foot in a golden slipper for a prince to kiss.

But Weenie listened to the low buzz of talk, and watched the strange actions with contemptuous discontent.

She was the most practical child in the world, and for her life could see nothing of the cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces wherein her sisters were

dwelling. There was no glittering throne for her eyes, no dazzlingly beautiful princess gracefully extending a foot slippered in gleaming gold. There was merely Dolly to be seen, rosy-cheeked, ordinary little Dolly with a long bath-towel trailing from her waist, and the pincushion-cover on her head. And she was just sitting on two pillows with a very silly look on her face, and was stiffly sticking out a foot clad in a plain black stocking and well-worn house shoe.

"Oh," said the little weary one, "please, Dolly, isn't zere a dog in the story, and I could bark—or isn't zere a drate bear and I could roar?" Dolly was advancing now towards the washstand with her arm crooked slightly, a small pocket-handkerchief hanging over her curls, and an ineffable smile on her face. The prince was leading her, a bride, up the rose-strewn church-path, and the air was full of joy-bells and the happy voices of the villagers. Weenie caught pleadingly at the black frock. "Or I could be ze wicked old woman, and chase you," she said.

"She's been put in a spiked barrel, and is rolling down a mountain," Phyl said darkly; "her machinations are over." She pronounced the word "machine-ashones," and her tongue lingered admiringly over it.

"Zen I'll be ze little dog, and I'll drink up your blood when your head falls off," said Weenie, undeterred. That and the character of the "sullen heads-

man " were the only parts that took her fancy in the frequently played drama *Mary Queen of Scots.*

Dolly turned from the washstand altar, her bouquet (the three small tooth-brushes) in her hand. There was a sound of tears in the forlorn little sister's voice that touched her conscience.

" We might play Wobin Hood for a little time—eh,

" Isn't zere a dog in the story ? "

Phyl ? " she said, unwillingly taking off her bridal veil and putting it back in her pocket. There were opportunities for shooting, a lively work in this game which led Weenie to tolerate it.

" All right," Phyl said, also softened by the lonely tone in the small sister's voice.

Weenie scrambled energetically up a bedpost and hung there, showing her small gleaming teeth.

"We're playing Zoo," she said, swift to take advantage of the concession. "I am ze monkey, an' Phyl can be ze effelunt, an' Dolly's ze tross old zrinoceros."

The room was in an uproar speedily, Dolly and Phyl playing their allotted parts with great vigour and enjoyment. "We can be pwetending we're pwincesses, an' have been changed into these shapes," Dolly seized a moment to whisper consolingly to Phyl. Then she swung herself over the foot-rail of the bed and hung head downwards and growled, which pleased Weenie's ideas of realism even if it was hardly in accordance with the character of rhinoceros.

CHAPTER III

FAMILY MATTERS

IT was a pleasant smiling-faced place this English home of the three little maids. Phyl and Dolly would like to have heard it was old enough to call it a "venerable pile" or an "ancient structure," but, as a matter of fact, its age was not more than sixty or seventy years. It was of brown, rough stone, mellowed to a harmonious tint by the suns and rains of that more than half-century. It was square in shape with a big, welcoming porch at the front, round which in summer roses clustered, but that winter saw fringed with icicles. All the rooms were big and bright, with old-fashioned furniture, the wood of which was chiefly oak, and the draperies and cushions of flowered chintz in delicate colours. From the gate a broad drive, ill-kept at this time, swept to the porch, then curved and ran behind the house to the empty stables. A shrubbery filled the broad space between the left side of the house and the thick, tall hedge that cut it off from the road; the right side looked

over a vegetable garden, chiefly filled with gooseberries, and saw at the limit of the grounds that side a high red brick wall where a cherished apricot-tree grew vine-wise.

At the front stretched a green unmown lawn, lovely to play upon; a high green bank at the end had to be climbed to come to a strawberry bed, where as many as three berries had ripened at a time. Red, white, and black currant-bushes, red and yellow raspberries grew in a tangle beyond, and then came the orchard trees—apples, pears, and mulberries.

Phyl had a dim and fading recollection of an earlier home than this—a home that brought memories of more flowers and many more books than this brown-grey, pleasant place of later play-days; a home where her lisping voice had called father a grave, sad-faced scholar, who was in no wise like the laughing, merry-natured man for whom nearly all were wearing these fresh black frocks.

Weenie and the elder little girls were only half-sisters. As a high-spirited, beautiful girl of seventeen Mrs. Conway had won the love of a man double her own age, and one for whom all life had gone sadly. Pleased and touched at the wealth of love he brought her, though she was hardly old enough to reciprocate it properly, she accepted him, and they were married at once, her parents, stern, strict Christians of the old, long dead school, being glad to give their daughter into such safe hands.

Three years went by, and the girl was still happy, a little more touched with soberness perhaps at the quiet, reclusive life they led, but a very child again, with two little daughters, Phyl and Dolly, who came to spread sunshine through the quiet, book-filled house. But when Dorothy was barely out of long clothes, and Phyl a slender, restless sprite of three, the girl—wife and mother already before she was twenty-one—was also a widow. Her husband, called on sudden business to Paris, stayed at a hotel where the sheets on his bed were damp, and so sudden and violent an illness followed that he was dead and buried before she had time fairly to realize the news.

Three years slipped by again, the widow living in seclusion, and devoting herself entirely to her little girls. And then, so young yet and full of life, and so overcome by her loneliness, she married again—a widower this time, with a half-grown-up family of boys and girls.

The young, glad love her years reasonably entitled her to, again had slipped past her. Relief at the escape from the rigid discipline of her girlhood's home, together with the wealth of tender, almost fatherly love showered upon her by her husband, had led her in her first marriage not to miss that blossoming spring-time. And now, saddened and chastened in spirit, it seemed to her that only a man of two-score years could give her the tender protection and cherishing for which she was yearning again.

And, again, a wealth of affection was given her: surely few women have passed down life with so great a power of making love spring up for them in every heart. But with these autumn roses of love came also many thorns.

There were the ceaseless discussions that are almost inevitable when a father brings a very young wife home to sons and daughters of almost a like age. And there were years of nursing.

Mr. Conway, a year after the marriage, fell ill of an incurable disease, and until his death, some four years later, the slight shoulders of his new wife carried—and carried cheerfully and patiently—a burden few older women are called upon to bear.

In addition to the unruly household, the wearing struggle to preserve justice and peace between the elder members of the family and her own little girls —now three in number—and the continual nursings for the last two years of her husband's life, Mrs. Conway picked up the reins of business his fingers had gradually dropped, and managed to guide affairs so as to keep off, for all that time, the ruin with which they had been threatened.

Mr. Conway was a manufacturer, and before this lingering illness sapped his energy a moderately wealthy one. The little girls had often driven over with him to the busy, noisy town, five miles away, and had been taken over the big factories and seen the great looms at work, and shuddered at the big

engines and the swarms of dirty-looking men, women, and children. Phyl and Dolly used to be in a state of nervous trepidation each time they were inside the building lest an arm of a loom should descend, entangle itself in the hair of one of them, or rise up again with a dangling body to the ceiling; they had heard some such accident talked of once. Weenie alone approved of it, and asked to be taken again; the clashing and banging and whirring seemed most jolly to her.

But foreign competition, together with strikes and bad management, struck such blows that two years before the death of Mr. Conway the factories were almost at a standstill, and complete ruin stared the big family in the face. It was then the brave-hearted wife stepped into the breach. From her husband and the foremen of the different buildings she managed to learn nearly every technicality connected with the business; she withdrew, all but four hundred pounds, the small fortune that had been settled on Phyl and Dolly after their father's death, and spent it in starting the looms to work once more. Day and night she worked, business woman, wife, mother, and nurse, and the old home for two more years still sheltered them within its walls, and the best of medical skill was made available.

But now at length it was all over. Two months had passed since the long, sad procession had wound away down the red drive, and away up the beautiful

country road to the Place of Peace. Lawyers and business men, relatives and friends, had come and gone. The factories stood silent again, and there was no money anywhere to galvanize them into fresh life. The big boys and girls were scattered all over England; the girls with relations until they could help themselves, the boys already helping themselves, taken into offices of business friends.

The servants were dismissed—all but Harriet Bywater, who had been the children's nurse since Dorothy was born, and now insisted upon being laundress and cook and housemaid and friend to them for the little time that remained.

Such a very little time it was now; the house had been bought, but the owner was abroad, and had left instructions that the widow was not to be disturbed until he was ready to occupy. This had given two peaceful months in which to make plans for the future and lay the past aside in its sorrowful shroud, but now word had come that in one more month the workmen would arrive to make additions and alterations to the house.

The three little girls, after their first passionate tears and grief were spent, had slipped gradually back as children will into their old ways of life and play. It was a week after the midnight rescue of Jennie and Suey that they were first told of and began to realize the strange thing that was going to happen in their lives.

CHAPTER IV

A WINTER SUNDAY

ON Sunday evenings it had always been the custom for the little girls to gather round their mother, and talk of their funny little plans, tell of their past week's naughtinesses, make high resolutions with earnest eyes for future weeks, and generally disburden themselves. Of late the time had been very precious to both mother and children, for all week-days had been so brimmed with work, the mother had scarcely any time to pause to watch the wings of their young souls develop, and prune them, and pluck out the dark feathers that creep in so readily.

The elder boys and girls had often scoffed and laughed at the quiet hour that was always taken on that one evening of the week, but nothing had made the mother relinquish it.

This Sunday evening when the great news was first told, the house seemed strangely quiet and lonely. Outside a noiseless fall of snow was making the garden and road all gleaming white, and an icy-

handed wind tapped at the window-pane and rattled the doors as if eager to get inside to the warmth and comfort.

Harriet had just taken away the tea-tray, and poked up the fire of the cosy little breakfast-room, which, apart from the bedrooms, was the only room they used now.

The sense of peacefulness was very exquisite to Phyl and Dolly; they lay on the hearthrug side by side and gazed into the fire. The very tea they had just finished had in some strange way appealed to them—the round table with its spotless cloth, the delicate pale-green china cups and plates, the thin bread-and-butter, the amber jelly, the limpid honey, the toasted Sally-lunn. It was even a dreamy pleasure to watch the tea being made in the silver tea-pot with a wide spout like a dragon's mouth, and to remember that mother's mother's mother's mother had once poured out from it.

Their thoughts shrank away from the five years that had just finished, the noisy, rough, nursery meals, the teasing and boisterous raillery, the unmerciful ridicule that had been heaped on their ways of talk and play. This tender firelit evening seemed like a bit of the dreamy past come back.

"I've been twite good, haven't done anysin' or anysin' for twenty hundred days," announced Weenie, sitting up straight on her mother's knee and commencing operations.

"It's my turn to say first," said Phyl, and she also sat up and looked business-like; "let's be quick to-night." She never settled quite comfortably to the evening until she had acknowledged the week's transgressions.

"Well," said Mrs. Conway, "I hope no one has a big list to-night, for I want to do most of the talking myself. Phyl, darling, I hope you have been trying harder this week."

Phyllida looked thoughtful. "Really on Monday and Tuesday I did, mother," she said; "Weenie was dreadfully tiresome, and I hardly said anything to her. But on Wednesday I *was* bad. I made you cry, Weenie, didn't I, when you broke the doll's saucepan? And I know she really didn't do it on purpose."

"The handle of the old thing was broken before, it just comed off in my hand," said Weenie, with a look of injured innocence.

"You know we have forbidden you to touch our things," Phyl said, severity taking the place of penitence in her voice.

"It would have lasted for long enough," Dorothy said; "it would have been quite good enough to make the soup in,—the handle was only the tiniest bit cwacked." She looked perilously near being angry again at the recollection.

"Come, come," the mother said, "it will be no use for you to tell me these things, if you feel naughty

again immediately. Anything else, Phyl?" Phyl's eyes fell. "On Thursday I teased Harriet again," she said, and recounted the details of the sinfulness, "and I was sorry all the time," she added in a vague sort of wonder at herself. "I knew I was horrid, but every minute things kept popping into my head that I knew would vex her, and I couldn't help doing

"I got on her back while she was washing the floor."

them. I even got on her back while she was washing the floor, and you *know* how that makes her rage."

The mother was glad her hand was hiding her mouth; she had witnessed this reprehensible scene two or three times, and had been girlish enough to see the humorous side of it. But she spoke gravely of the kindness and consideration one owes to depend-

ants, and of Harriet's sterling goodness, till Phyl wanted to rush off and kiss the ill-used girl for compensation.

"I hope that is all, Phyl," Mrs. Conway said.

"No," Phyl said in a shamed whisper; "in church this morning I thought about the carpet for the dolls-house, and I couldn't help pretending Miss Keating and the little girl in her pew were Ellen Montgomery and Alice Humphreys."

Then Dolly rose up from her lowly position and recited similar sins with similar sadness in her eyes.

She too had been cross with Weenie on Wednesday, because of the doll's saucepan, and on Thursday because she would keep making a noise just when Jennie and Suey were going to sleep.

"Pooh," said Weenie, "they's nosing but old dolls. If forty thousand earfquakes camed, they wouldn't hear."

"Anything else, Dolly?" interposed Mrs. Conway, swift to avert the heated discussion that would otherwise have followed this statement. "I suppose you too made Harriet's life a burden, and also sat on her back while she washed the floor."

Strange to relate, Dolly had not kept close to Phyl in this.

"No, I didn't, mama," she said in surprise; "don't you remember I was helping you put the silver in tissue-paper?" Then her head dropped a little.

"But in the afternoon I called her a demon," she said.

Mrs. Conway was much startled, though she knew of the strange little bursts of anger that sometimes possessed her second small daughter.

"Oh, Dolly," she said in a grieving voice, "that a word like that should come from the lips of one of my little girls!"

Dorothy in her turn was horrified.

"Oh," she said, "I didn't weally say it with my tongue, mama—Ha'yat didn't hear at all; I said it down in my thwoat."

"That is nearly as bad," said the mother, and called upon the young person to account for such a word rising even to her throat.

Dorothy spoke of the circumstances that caused the heinous offence in low tones. It seemed Jennie and Suey were dangerously ill in bed with consumption and "appleplexy," and of course they ought to have been kept very warm, and the counterpane being thin, they had covered the bed over with one of their sealskin jackets. And just as the "crisis" came, Harriet had dragged the jacket away to hang it up, and all the clothes were pulled off Jennie, too.

"She hadn't a thing left on but her night-gown, and her flannel jacket," said the child.

"She had a frightful relapse," said Phyl darkly, "and it turned to heart disease."

The children had lately picked up the words

"crisis," "relapse," and "convalescent," and their application of them was a trifle amusing. Jennie was subject to as many as seven "relapses" in one day, while the "crisis" of hers and Suey's various complaints occurred as often as three times in a morning. If you met a doll wrapped up to its eyes, being slowly wheeled up and down the drive, you would know the "convalescent" stage was reached.

"Now, my Weenie one," said the mother, after a wise little talk on the wrongfulness of saying "demon" in one's throat.

Weenie untucked herself deliberately.

"I took the biggest piece of cake to-night," she said, "but if I hadn't took it, Phyl would, or Dolly; then they would have been greedy 'stead."

"That's one," said Mrs. Conway.

"There was lots and crowds of tarts in the pantry on Sursday, 'bout thirty hundred,—I only took one."

"That's two," said the mother, adding one more finger to the hand she was holding up to number the crimes.

Weenie looked carefully away from the elder sisters while she confessed the next item.

"On Wesenday I gave Jennie and Suey a frashing," she said. "Well, Phyl and Dolly should have played with me—serves them right."

Phyl and Dolly sprang to their feet, a wrathful scarlet rushing into their faces; this was the first intimation they had had that the bodies of their

darlings had been so maltreated, and they looked as if they could have fallen on the offender and "frashed" her in retaliation.

But Weenie blinked at them mildly from her secure position.

"An uzzer time," she said, "p'raps you will let me play with you."

Again the mother shielded her face as if from the fire.

"That was very, very naughty," she said, when she could trust her voice; she knew the hearts of the two little mothers were bleeding for the unmerited sufferings of their darlings. "What should you think, Weenie, if auntie and I quarrelled, and then when I was out of the way, auntie came and thrashed you?"

But Weenie looked more supercilious than repentant.

"They's only got sawdust in their ole bodies, they's nosing but dolls," she said; "it didn't hurt them."

"But it hurt poor Phyl and Dolly," the mother said.

"Um," said Weenie's lips. Her eyes added that they had brought it entirely upon themselves.

Three accusing fingers were standing up against her.

"Anything else?" said Mrs. Conway.

"Fordet what else," said her babyship, and tucked herself up again to dismiss the subject. Then she untucked herself half-an-inch. "Le's have a lump of iggy to put in mine pocket," she said. Phyl laughed

at her. In her haste to proffer this request, the small one had fallen back into the baby word she had called "sugar" during the first year or two of her initiation into speech and language.

"Yes, it sud have some iggy, it sud, poor little baby," Phyl said teasingly.

Weenie blushed painfully.

"Well, I can say my R's and Dolly can't," she said excusingly. "Dolly says Yobbin Yedbwest."

It was Dolly's turn to grow pink. She was very sensitive about this defect in her speech.

"You are both dreadful little babies," said Phyl, with a superior smile.

"I knew a still more dreadful baby," said the mother. "Weenie, there never was such a silly little girl as Phyl when she was even bigger than you. Why, what do you think she called my silver thimble even when she was five?"

Phyl blushed in her turn now, but Weenie was eager.

"Oh, tell's," she said.

"Simby-fimby," said the mother; "that's quite as bad as 'iggy,' isn't it?"

Weenie laughed chucklingly.

"Tell's some more," she said.

"Sometimes," said the mother, "when I was working the machine she used to play with the tools in the drawer. And she always called the screw-driver 'mama's coy-guiby.'"

Dolly laughed derisively this time to vindicate the R's her tongue could *not* bring straight.

"Coy-guiby, coy-guiby," she echoed mockingly.

The mother smiled.

"Dolly could not say pinafore," she continued, "until she was quite a great girl. 'Pindispy' she used to call it—'banty my pindispy, mama,' meant 'button my pinafore,' but no one would have guessed it, would they, Phyl?"

But Phyl gave Dolly a sudden loving kiss just where the pink had sprung again on her cheek, and the intricacies of language were no longer dwelt upon.

"Dear ones," the mother said, growing suddenly grave, "in two more days I may have a very great piece of news to tell you. But I have something to tell you even now. In just one month we shall go away for ever from this house. We are very, very poor now, so poor I am almost afraid to think about it. But that you knew, didn't you?"

They had just known without comprehending. True, they had said good-bye to the servants, and had known they were being sent away because the mother could no longer afford to pay them. And they knew Mr. Conway's children were all gone to make ways for themselves in the world.

They tried hard to realize the fact now and console their mother at the same time, so grave and sad was her face.

"We don't care, darling," Phyl said, "we'll wear our old frocks; we shan't want new ones for long enough, shall we, Dolly? And those last boots we had will last us a long time yet."

Mrs Conway smiled sadly.

"There are other things besides frocks and boots," she said.

Dolly nodded wisely.

"Meat and puddings and things, of course," she said. "Couldn't we go without meat, mama? We all like puddings better, and Ha'yat says meat is a fwightful pwice."

The mother smiled and sighed again.

"There are even other things besides meat, my daughter," she said.

"You can have my silver mug to make shillings wif," said Weenie, grasping as well as she could at the idea that there was no money for any of them.

"Go away in a month?" echoed Phyl; "wherever shall we go?—Oh, we can't go and leave this house, mother, think how long we've been living here."

But Dolly gave a sudden joyful skip.

"Shall we have a dear little weeney-teeney cottage like Mrs. Meredith's, all covered with ivy and things?" she said.

At that Phyl lost her apprehension and skipped too. The dwelling of Mrs. Meredith, a naval officer's widow, was like a tiny fairy house to them.

"*How* lovely!" she said, "and no servants; Mrs.

Meredith has only a little girl. Oh, *let* me have whitening the steps for my work, mummie darling?"

"I'll wash the floors," Dolly cried joyously.

Weenie clambered higher on her mother's knee.

"She isn't to do them all, is she, mama?—le's wash some, won't you?"

Mrs. Conway kissed her and set her down.

"We shall be far poorer than Mrs. Meredith," she said, "but don't worry, darlings—mother will see you don't quite starve."

She went to bed that Sunday night comforted in some strange way by the uncrushable spirits of childhood.

CHAPTER V

WHICH RUSHES FOURTEEN THOUSAND MILES AWAY

"If I had guessed, if I had dreamed
Its weight was meant for me,
I should have built a lighter cross
To bear up Calvary."

To the lad swinging monotonously on the gate, the straight grey road that lay in front of his house seemed to run on to dull eternity. Far away where the horizon cut it off from further sight the red, inflamed eye of the sun was sinking down. A few spindly gum-trees showed black against the fierce-coloured surrounding sky, and nearer some of the black straggling colliery buildings lay athwart a cloud-patch of bruised purple.

A bullock-dray crept into sight; the lad had seen it on the road when it had looked like a toy procession; now it had come nearer and nearer, and the big patient beasts blinked wearily at the swinging gate as they passed.

"Hi!" called the boy to the drover. "You're a nice one, two of your fires are out."

"No! are they?" said the man, drooping his whip and stepping closer to the animals.

"That one, and that one," said the boy.

The man pulled some handfuls of gum-leaves from a tree by the roadside and felt in his pocket for his matches. A thin bar crossed each bullock's back, and suspended from it on either side was a small iron pot, where a fire, generally of bark and pungent leaves, burnt ceaselessly to keep off the mosquitoes.

"I've never seen them worse," said the man with a groan; "I've come five miles in a curtain of 'em—I suppose I've been so busy flicking myself I didn't notice."

"You should see them in our house," said the boy.

"You should ha' seen them on the station," said the man.

"Didn't I?" said the boy. "Wasn't I there for the letters this morning? The train was an hour late again, and the men who were waiting for it made a fire on the platform and stood in the smoke."

"It's the most God-forsaken hole on the face of the globe," said the man. "I'm cutting it—off on Monday; been here a month, and that's four weeks too much. Well—so-long."

He cracked his long whip and the team lumbered wearily off on its journey again.

"Clif," called a tired voice from a side window, "are you there, Clif? I wish you'd come and take baby for me."

"I'm not there," muttered Clif to himself, "I'm at the front. I mightn't have heard." He slipped off the gate and glided away into a stretch of scrubby bush adjacent. Then with a defiant look at the windows of the house behind he stalked off to his own particular den, or what his mother called his "sulking-place," a hollow, hidden against the bank where the colliery railway ran. He flung himself down and kicked monotonously with his boot-heels on the pebbly ground. It was one of the days that came so often to him, when he was in fierce revolt with his surroundings, and wished himself or else all the rest of the world dead and buried.

He was a thin boy, between twelve and thirteen; his hair had a crisp wave in it that lent height to his forehead; his eyes were a deep blue, sombre, even sullen at times in expression; his mouth accentuated the sullenness.

Lying in his den he brooded again on his grievances, and the life with which he was so sorely out of joint. What he seemed to resent more than anything in the world was the number of children in their house, and the noise they made, and the way they had to be looked after. He was always being pressed into the service himself to rock a cradle or push a perambulator, for between himself and the delicate baby just short-coated were three other little boys, and his mother had but one pair of hands. They could not afford a nurse; they could not even afford a well-trained

servant—only a rough Irish girl for everything—for Dr. Wise, the father, was club doctor to the colliery, and the salary a miserable one.

Sunnymeade this desolate place was called—in native language it had been termed Moondi-Moondi, or Swamp Place, and surely of all misnomers given by Australians in lieu of the curiously applicable aboriginal names, Sunnymeade for such a place was worst.

Clif's grievance to-day was caused by a rankling sense of injustice on his mother's part. She herself was one of the most absolutely unselfish women in the world, and strove to make her children the same. But Clif had a keen sense of the rights of property. That afternoon he had finished a little boat, and with infinite labour had fitted it with a mast and two sails. He took it proudly in to show his mother and gain her praise.

She was rocking the fractious baby and keeping a watchful eye at the same time on Richie and Alf, whose combined ages only made eight years.

"Yes, very pretty," she said,—"mind the fender, Richie—very pretty indeed—made it all by yourself, my son—you're getting famously clever, aren't you? —you'll be building us a new house soon."

This was not the appreciation Clif wanted—it sounded humouring, as if his mother were talking to Richie or Alf. He yearned for some one to notice intelligently that there was a real rudder fastened on

with a bit of wire, and that the bow was shaped for cutting through the water.

Baby stopped crying a moment and sucked his fist ravenously—perhaps his mother could attend now for a minute or two.

"If you notice," he said shyly, "the rudder moves; I've tied a bit of wire to it, and if you pull it, it will guide the boat just where you want it to go."

The mother glanced at it wearily.

"Beautiful," she said. "I don't know how you could think of it—Richie, get off that chair, do you hear me—get down at once—Clif, lift him down, and put his shoes on; he's kicked them off."

Clif fastened on the shoes and turned the chair upside down, so that it could not be climbed on again. Whereupon Richie devoted fresh attention to his eldest brother.

"Div Richie ze ickie boat," he said coaxingly.

"I'm sure," said Clif, and gathered it jealously to him.

Alf rushed up clamouring.

"I want to play with the boat," he said.

"Here, cut—go and play," Clif said, and lifted his boat for safety out of reach.

The afternoon had been terribly hot, and the poor little fellows, between sandflies and mosquitoes and heat, were cross and tired.

"Wants ze boat," repeated Richie, his voice risen suddenly to crying pitch, and his eyes weeping tears.

"Give us the boat," cried Alf in chorus.

Clif retreated towards the door, glowering at the idea of sacrilege.

"Clif," said his mother, between the baby's fresh screams, "don't be selfish; lend the boat to your little brothers."

Clif was quite pale.

"Wants ze boat,—give us the boat.

"I have been three days making it," he said; "it is my very own."

"Well," she returned wearily, "it is sweeter to make things for other people's enjoyment than our own."

But Clif was far too young and human to agree with this.

"It is mine," he said obstinately, "my very own; I

won't let them have it—let them play with their own toys."

"Clif," said the mother, and called him to her knee when she had lain baby face downward for a little time —she put her arm round him and looked at him with earnest, grieving eyes—"Clif, it breaks my heart to see you growing like this—I cannot have it—give the boat to your brothers for half-an-hour."

Passion surged in the boy; a wave of red ran up into his very hair.

"You always say that—I never have my things to myself; when a thing's mine, it's mine—it isn't any one's unless I say," he burst out excitedly. "I don't take their things; they oughtn't to take mine."

"It's very different," Mrs. Wise said; "think how much older you are; a selfish boy grows into a selfish man. Clif, give up the little boat at once."

Even in his anger, somewhere in his young complex nature there was something that told the boy he was not being properly treated. If he had been asked kindly to lend the toy, even if he had refused at first, he felt he would have been glad to do so afterwards, if once it were clearly established that the right of refusing or consenting lay entirely with him. But this disposal of his property roused a fury in his breast.

"Take it," he said, and flung the toy he had worked at with eager pleasure so roughly on the ground at his brothers' feet that it broke in two or three pieces—he

had only saved himself by a strong effort from flinging it at Alf's round head.

"Clif!" cried his mother, something like despair in her voice—"Clif!"

But he had rushed away out of the room and house.

Mrs. Wise tucked the baby beneath her arm for a moment, and crossed to the bookcase with a sigh. She reached three books down from the top shelf—one a thin pamphlet, titled *On the Training and Education of our Boys;* the second, *Human Buds, and our Responsibilities in the Grafting of Them;* the third, *Children, their Souls and Minds.*

"Perhaps it is my fault," she muttered. Then she went back to her rocking-chair and buried herself in the books so deeply that she was quite deaf to the fierce quarrel that took place between Alf and Richie, and even hardly heard her infant's cries.

She was a small, slight woman with a sallow-coloured skin stretched tightly over her bones. Her eyes were dull blue, faded by the tear-washings of many a year; her hair was light and colourless, pinned away with absolute disregard for appearance. She wore the very gown she should have shunned—a drab cotton wrapper.

Put carefully away in her work-box there was a large miniature protected by glass and enclosed in a dainty case. It represented a very sweet-faced girl, with blue, happy eyes; red, slightly pouting lips;

rounded pink cheeks; and sunshiny hair all curls and waves. This was the same woman at eighteen, before she had run away from a luxurious home and married the handsome young medical student, to whose suit her parents would not listen.

She was never forgiven or even recognized again by her people. And the rain of life came down too heavily for the poor butterfly nature. For all these fourteen years Dr. Wise had never been anything but direly poor; strive as he would he could make no way against the heavy handicap his early, headstrong folly had given him. It was seven years before he dare spare the time and money to complete his course and take his degree, and the other seven had been spent in struggling for a foothold in the profession and trying to keep a shelter over the poor little wife and all the babies that had come.

The young wife had been at first bewildered by all the misfortunes, and by the rapidly increasing family that she had to manage, totally inexperienced as she was, almost single-handed.

Childish resentment followed, but only for a short time. This young husband of hers, who had become grave, and old, and one-purposed, before he was twenty-four, was doing all man could do: she could blame nothing but their own wilfulness. Ill health and the dragging years brought apathy to her; she went through the ceaseless duties mechanically; she bathed and dressed her children, and mended their

clothes when she had time; she cooked and dusted; she ate and slept.

But after Richie's birth she had an illness that kept her helpless and a prisoner for six months. She lay in a private hospital in Sydney, for Dr. Wise dare not risk home-nursing for her in such a household as theirs was. He himself could only leave his practice to see her once a fortnight, for, apart from lost time, it cost over a pound for the railway-ticket; the children were brought to her twice only during all that time, for the heavy nursing had entirely emptied the family purse.

And during those long quiet months a sense—almost a terror—of her responsibilities was born in Mrs. Wise's soul.

These five boys of hers—who would grow into men and help to make or mar the world—what was she doing to help them grow as they should? Sometimes she would wake in the night, a cold perspiration breaking out all over her poor little face at the thought of difficult Clif grown to manhood and going off, with swinging steps, down that hill whose descent is so easy. She felt so weak, so helpless; five little girls she perhaps might have managed; but five boys, with boys' curious, rough, untractable natures—she trembled at the thought of going back to them.

When she rose from her bed at last, and the days of convalescence came, she crept to a book-shop one day, and with her veil down, and a strange trembling

hesitancy in her speech, asked if they had any books about training children. The man brought her *Kindergarten Studies; The Youth's Physical Manual; Recreation for the Young; The Care of the Child in Sickness and in Health.*

But she turned the leaves feverishly, there was no help for her there.

"A book on the training of their—their *moral* characters, is what I want," she said almost in a whisper, and after a long hunt the man found three dusty paper-covered books: *Human Buds; Souls and Minds of Children;* and *Training and Education of Boys.*

And these were the works she took back with her to Sunnymeade, to make life a harder problem than ever for herself.

Human Buds made a fine art of the training of children, and seemed to take for granted absolute wisdom and patience on the mother's part. Mrs. Wise made her eyes red and her heart weary over the things in it she had left undone that she ought to have done. "Never correct a child while you are angry," it said; "wait for calmness, and let mature reflection guide you as to the best punishment best fitted for the fault and for the offender." In another place: "Beware how you crush the frail wings of a child's imagination; but beware also how you foster the growth of them, for these Fancy Flights lead sometimes, in later life, to a strangely perverted sense of Truth and Honour."

In another: "These beautiful buds are your priceless gift; a life is not too long to give to watching them unfold, and patiently plucking off the leaves that spoil. Infinite patience, infinite wisdom, infinite love; these are the absolutely necessary tools of the Mother-Gardener.

"Example is your greatest weapon; every child is a copyist, you are its closest model. Strip yourself of your faults if you would not see them strengthening with the strength of your child."

Dr. Wise laughed at the books good-humouredly, and tried to soothe the agitation they had caused the poor woman. Life was far too crowded with work and care and trouble for him to study beautiful aphorisms, or make an art of bringing up these children of his.

The lads had never known him to lie or break a promise, be ungentle towards anything weak, or lack courage when occasion wanted it. But they had seen him angry scores of times, had heard him swear, had even experienced injustice from him in his swift and hurried arbitration of their quarrels.

"Don't worry your poor little head with things like these," he said, and tried to take the book from her. "See the little vagabonds have lots of tubbing, knock them over if they're impudent or tell lies, and don't let the big ones bully the little chaps. They'll come up all right."

But she clung to the volumes and would not give them up, though she said no more to him.

In her earnest desire to be "an example," she made herself absolutely—almost irritatingly unselfish. She worried the little lads to death with talk and advice and admonitions. She fell into the error of "nagging" at them where once she had shrugged her shoulders; she made them learn "Noble Truths" by heart, a new one each week, to be repeated every day. She punished them conscientiously for every fault, both of omission and commission. A vicious feeling came to Clif every time he saw the blue binding of *Human Buds, and our Responsibilities in the Grafting of Them.* For he recognized how much it had to do with all the worrying rules of the household.

CHAPTER VI

'BROWNSES' HOUSE'

ABOUT six o'clock in the evening Clif went back again from his "sulking-place." His heart was a tender one when the crust that gathered there was pierced, and something brought back to him the exceeding weariness of the voice that had called out of the window: "Clif,—are you there, Clif?"

"I'll go and rock that blessed kid for an hour," was his shamefaced thought as he went up the weed-sown path again.

The cottage was a weatherboard one, with the galvanized iron roof that makes life a burden during the summer days. The doctor's brass plate on the door was dull and smirched, the step was dirty, the children's toys lay about the verandah—it was easy to see Mrs. Wise was no manager.

Clif went through the passage and out to the back verandah, where late in the day most of the family congregated, that being the place that caught the faint breeze of the evening. The mother was in her

rocking-chair, and baby was asleep in her arms. Ted, who was three years younger than Clif, sat at her feet deep in *The Three Midshipmen.* Alf, who was stout, and six, was eating a slice of water-melon—he had bitten deeper and deeper into it till the broad green rind encircled his merry little face from ear to ear. On the ground just below the verandah there was a slight depression that, after rain, sometimes held as much as half a foot of water, and made a pool as big as a hand-basin. Here Richie was fishing, as usual, with a bit of bread fastened to a hair-pin and tied to a string.

Clif tried to be a bit cheerful.

"Hullo," he said as he passed, "any luck? Get any bites, Richie?"

"Ony free," said Richie mournfully.

"Why don't you put salt on the bread, old man?" Clif said; "you can't expect to catch fish without."

The little boy got up eagerly and trotted off to the kitchen to beg the necessary article. And Clif caught sight of a bit of his boat at the edge of the water, with the sail in the mud. He looked away from it quickly but with a queer feeling in his throat.

"Go and get your tea, Clif," his mother said. "Lizzie left it at the end of the dining-room table."

Her voice was very cold.

"Don't you want me to rock baby?" he said awkwardly.

"He is asleep."

"I'll tell the kids a story if you like."

"They are playing quite happily."

"Shall I help Lizzie get the baths?"

"No, thank you."

Human Buds said that silent displeasure was often the hardest punishment a mother could inflict.

The boy sighed and went off into the dining-room.

"Why don't you put salt on the bread, old man?"

"Dry bread, I s'pose," he muttered.

But there was a nicer tea than usual—bread-and-honey, plum-jam, a bit of gingerbread, and a slice of melon.

He eyed it uncomfortably, then after a struggle went out again to the verandah.

"I heard when you called," he said, red in the face; "you'd better take those things away."

"What things?" said his mother as coldly as ever. "I know you heard me."

"There's some cake and melon on the table," said Clif.

Alf went so red they both knew whose doing it was.

"I only thought we'd go halves," he said apologetically.

His mother kissed him.

"If Clif's conscience will let him eat it, he may," she said.

Clif went in again with heavy step, took a slice of bread-and-honey, and started out again for his den.

But there followed after him Alf with the rejected dainties.

"Go on," he said, "she said you could; it's awful nice, Clif."

"I don't want it," said Clif.

"It's got currants and peel in," said the tempter.

Clif dare not look at it; cake was a great treat to him, and his mouth was melting for it.

"I don't want it," he repeated.

Then Alf's patience gave way; he had waited a very long time, but human endurance would go no further. He said nothing, but Clif, just in front, heard his teeth crunching on the crisp melon, and was able to guess the exact moment the last crumb of cake disappeared.

"Was it that sugary sort of melon?" he could not help asking with anxiety in his eyes.

"Y-yes," admitted Alf unwillingly, and Clif sighed.

"I can spell platypus," volunteered the younger lad, in haste to get away from unpleasant subjects. Then he suddenly gave a hop of joy. "Guess what," he said; "I nearly forgot, and you don't know, do you?"

"What?" said Clif.

"'Brownses' House' is empty again," said the little boy; "p'raps some one nice will come."

"Brownses' House" was a rather pretty cottage with a garden, the back fence of which adjoined their own. It possessed the distinction of being one of the three—their own and the clergyman's being the other two—houses that formed the aristocracy of Sunnymeade. The rest of the population consisted of miners, and tradespeople who had come to supply their wants.

Clif's brow lightened a little.

"Let's go and look," he said, and they went and stood for half-an-hour gazing at the shut-up cottage.

It was the one place in Sunnymeade that had any "possibility" about it; everything else in the dreary village being plain, common fact.

The miners and their families lived in the monotonous ugly cottages dotted up and down the streets. Sometimes new ones came, sometimes old ones went away. It was all one to the little Wises; the children of the men were more than usually uncouth and rough,

and Mrs. Wise would not allow her boys to go among them.

The clergyman had been a fixture here for untold years; he had a married daughter keeping house for him, and two grand-children, a stolid boy of seven, and an equally stolid girl of nine.

But at "Brownses' House" people came and went as often as once a year, and there was always just the possibility that some one with a companionable family might some day come. One time Clif's spirits had been raised to the highest pitch of excitement and happiness by the sight of a boy of about thirteen looking over the dividing fence. He had never had a suitable companion of his own age, and his heart almost stood still with its shock of happiness. They made friends at once, and for a month life was ideal to Clif; they rode their rough ponies together, they got up a cricket club, they climbed trees, they swam and read and talked together.

But the boy's father had come to see if "Moondi-Moondi" would be a suitable place in which to start a law practice, and in less than a month he had shaken the dust of it off his feet, and "Brownses'" was empty again.

There had been other waves of excitement connected with it; the Brownes themselves, owners of the little place, had come up to try to spend an economical summer in it. But the mosquitoes had driven them back again in a week. Three or four

other families had taken the cottage at different times, but no one stayed permanently.

"Wonder how long it'll be empty *this* time," Clif said, peering in the windows and finding even the furniture had gone this time.

"'Bout a month I 'spect," Alf said; "don't you hope a boy like Alec comes again?"

But it was destined to stand with dusty, blindless windows, and empty echoing rooms, and tangled garden for just eight months—until the right people wanted it.

CHAPTER VII

A WAY TO WEALTH

"Do all that you know and try all that you don't,
Not a chance must be wasted to-day."

THE very day after that winter Sunday's talk Phyl and Dolly were most mysteriously busy, and nothing Weenie could urge would make them allow her to join them.

"We are not playing at all," they said severely; "run away at once, Weenie, we are doing something very important indeed."

"You're playing fairies, I *know* you are," contended Weenie. "I *will* play with you." She rushed after Dolly and hung on to her waist.

Dolly shook her off.

"Take no notice of her," she whispered to Phyl; "she can't guess what we're doing, and she'll soon get tired and go away."

They continued their work.

A disinterested observer would have imagined they were pretending they were blind, for they were moving

slowly up and down the room close to the wall with their finger-tips feeling carefully all over the paper. Sometimes one of them would rap on it with her knuckles, and the other put her ear close to the place and listen carefully.

Weenie watched them enviously all the time.

"I know," she said, "you're playing you're painting the house!"

When they had treated all four walls in this strange fashion they began on the stuffed chairs—they were in the drawing-room—and kneeling down in front of the two large ones and the sofa, they pushed their hands down the part where the backs joined the seats. Strange things too they brought up—buttons, several hairpins, a tiny pair of scissors lost for months, quantities of fluff and dust, and a silver sixpence. Weenie was quite excited at the various finds, but the elder girls took little notice and continued their work. They pulled a little table up close to the wall, climbed on it and peered behind every picture; they lifted two or three rugs and looked underneath; Phyl even poked her arms up the chimney, felt about and withdrew them black with soot.

As Dolly had foretold, Weenie's patience was not equal to her curiosity, and after a time she wandered away. But when the same strange proceedings began again in the afternoon, and all that time neither of her sisters would join in a single game, she became quite frantic to discover the mystery.

At four o'clock in the afternoon their mother was lying down in a bedroom with a headache.

Phyl and Dolly had treated every room in the house but that large front bedroom in the same way as the drawing-room, and now they stood on the threshold of that with pale lips but determined eyes.

"I don't think we can do this one," Dolly faltered, cold thrills running through her at the remembrance that it was through this door they had gone, slowly, and on tip-toe, two months ago, to kiss that cold, quiet face on the pillow, and lay white roses and snowdrops on the still breast.

Phyl's eyes were drenched with tears at the same memory, and her sensitive lips all a-quiver. But she turned the handle with a firm hand and they went in.

Through the windows a cold spring wind was blowing, it was the only thing of life in the quiet room. The bed was covered as of old with the blue silk eiderdown quilt; the book-table, that had always been disorderly with books and magazines and papers, was quite bare; the great cushioned chair stretched out its empty arms as if bemoaning its vacancy.

Dolly sobbed aloud and ran to a big bookcase that had been brought here during the last long illness. Phyl, her tears falling like rain, followed. They began at one end, and taking down the books,

one after the other, opened the covers, looked in them carefully, and then, holding them by their backs, shook them gently. They put the finished ones on the floor in stacks. Soon there were piles of them everywhere, big dusty books long unopened, hard-worked volumes with their covers dropping off, gaily bound new ones, dull thick ones with scientific names; the stacks were three feet high in places, the atmosphere was full of dust, but the sorrowful-faced, earnest-eyed little girls worked on steadily with never a moment's rest.

Then there came Weenie in search of them—Weenie, round-eyed, open-mouthed at the terrible sacrilege in this quiet, strange room where her father had lain dead.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"Go away," said Dolly.

"G—go away at once," said Phyl; "we're not playing, Weenie."

Weenie could see they were not; at all events it must be a very strange game if they were, for their eyes still streamed.

She ran away, right down the passage to their own room where the mother lay asleep.

"Oh, mama!" she cried, climbing up on the bed and patting her mother's cheeks to wake her.

Mrs. Conway's eyes sprang open, and Weenie tugged vigorously at her sleeve.

"Come on quickerly," she said; "oh, ever so

quickerly; naughty Phyl and Dolly's in dadda's room, makin' it awful drefful."

The mother rose up and followed her, though her blinding headache would hardly allow her to keep her eyelids open.

When she saw the havoc in the quiet place, she leaned against the doorpost quite overcome.

"We're not playing, Weenie."

"How could you?" she cried, her voice thrilling with pain—"how could you?—how *could* you?"

She gathered up her strength and tottered across the room; she began on one of the heaps, replacing feverishly book after book.

"Oh, go away," she said; "go away all of you."

"Mama!" cried Dolly, catching at her hands, "oh, what is it, mama?"

"This room!" moaned the mother. "Oh, how *could* you come here?"

She began to work at another heap—her trembling hands seized the top book—*Martin Chuzzlewit* it was. A paper-knife was stuck into the pages enshrining Augustus Moddle's proposal to Charity Pecksniff.

Not three months ago she had brought a smile to her husband's face by reading it to him one sleepless night. The memory was too much for her, she dropped the volume and sank into a chair, her heart breaking afresh.

Phyl and Dolly rushed to her, knelt by her side, clasped her, kissed her a thousand times, called her by tender names. When she saw their passionate grief she calmed herself with a strong effort and sat up again.

"There," she said, with woful eyes, "there, my dear ones: hush, Phyl; hush, hush, Dolly—I might have known my darlings did not mean to be unkind,—they forgot where they were playing, didn't they?"

Phyl's very breath seemed to go.

"Playing?" she echoed in a strange voice.

"Oh!" cried Dolly, her sobs breaking forth afresh; "did you weally think we were playing, mama?"

"Why," faltered the mother, glancing round,

"what were you doing then? Tidying the book-shelves? Tell me, darlings."

Phyl lifted her poor little golden head. "We were looking for the lost will," she whispered.

"The what?" said the mother, mystified.

"The will that is hidden," whispered Phyl.

"But there isn't such a thing," the mother said; "it was safely put away in father's desk; the day uncle and Mr. Bright and all those people came it was read."

"But the other will," said Dolly, "the one that was made before, leaving lots of money to you."

"My little sweethearts," said the mother wearily, "what is it you mean? I can't understand you in the least."

Phyl made an effort to be intelligible. "We thought," she said, "if we found another will that we needn't be poor at all. People often hide them in strange places, behind wainscotching and secret panels and things, or in the loose covers of books. We've looked in all the other rooms, but we thought it was most likely to be here, so—so we looked."

The mother, with all the calls there had been on her time, had no idea of the miscellaneous reading of her daughters; she would have been amazed to know of the scores of stories they had read in Harriet's *Bow Bells*, and *Young Ladies' Magazines*, and Penny Weeklies. Of course, therefore, they were acquainted with all the delightful ways lost wills were discovered

in strange hiding-places, and immense properties thereby restored to the heroes and heroines of the tales.

"Very likely there's a secret back to father's desk," Dolly said; "won't you please look, mama? we didn't like to touch that."

Mrs. Conway's head was too bad for her to fully enjoy the absurdity of the serious-eyed children at the time, though she often smiled over it in later years.

"You can put the books all back," she said; "if fifty more wills were discovered there would be no more money, dear ones, for the simple reason there was nothing to leave."

They went back to the nursery, sadness in their eyes at this summary wrecking of all the romantic castles they had built.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PITILESS LONDON STREETS

UNBOLSTERED in such ways of hope, their thoughts flew to wild extremes; Phyl was ill again, and was confined to bed; the harsh biting winters always caught at her poor little chest, and four or five times from November to March they were obliged to keep her a week or more safely amongst the blankets. Dolly was of course always her faithful companion and slave at such times, and the days never dragged; if those two had been set down on a desert island for a year, their quaint resources and strange imaginings would have filled every day to the brim with action and enjoyment.

And this time they had a limitless subject for discussion.

They had climbed up their own particular bean-stalk of imagination, and peeped into the land of poverty wherein soon their feet were to walk.

Dolly went about as much as she could, unobserved, without her boots.

"They'll wear out quickly enough twamping about the stweets," she said. "I'll take good care of them now."

Weenie slipped hers off. "Le's take our stockings off too, Dolly," she said, "then they won't get worned out."

"Oh," said Dolly, "stockings are cheap, I think—besides we could go without them altogether; the little girls who came selling holly had no stockings on at all."

Phyl, tied to bed, could not economize in this way, but when Harriet ran up with her eleven o'clock lunch-tray she only ate half the bread to her beef-tea, and did not touch the arrowroot biscuits. "Here," she said, gathering them up carefully, "put them in the box quickly, Dolly, before Harriet comes back, or she'll make me eat them."

Dolly got out the old bonnet-box, that until the last few days had held their patches of materials for dolls' clothes. It was half full of broken victuals,—bits of cake, bread, a jar with butter in it, quite a quantity of sugar that they had saved instead of having it in their tea; even a couple of mutton-chops.

This was to provide against the coming days when they would be starving in the streets of London, and was to be brought out as a beautiful surprise to their mother when she was tired out one day and hopeless of getting food for dinner.

Phyl and Dolly sketched the future with dark

enjoyment on their faces, and Weenie listened aghast.

Their mother, of course, would strive to earn a livelihood by singing in the snowy London streets, Weenie in her arms, themselves beside her trying to sell bunches of violets or watercress, or even shoe-laces. Sometimes the passers-by would put pennies into their mother's hand, or buy their own wares, but sometimes no one would take any notice of them at all, and they would go home at length to a dark, damp cellar, and divide a crust of bread amongst them, and sleep on the old floor beneath sacks.

At this point in the pleasing prospect Weenie used to cry dismally, and their own eyes would fill with tears of self-pity.

They would pursue it a little further, however; their clothes would grow more and more ragged, and the wind would whistle through them, and chill them to the bone; they would all be barefoot, their boots having worn out and their stockings gone long since; and they would all have such hacking coughs that the passers-by, hurrying away to their rich, luxurious homes, would occasionally fling them a glance of pity. And at last a benevolent old gentleman would be passing by, and touched at their distress would put his hand hastily in his pocket and bring out a coin which he would slip into their mother's hand with the words, "Here's a shilling for you, my poor woman," and when he got some distance away they would

discover he had given them a sovereign in mistake. And the mother would sternly put away the temptation to buy food and clothes for her starving children with it, and bid Phyl and Dolly run after him and tell him of the mistake. And they would catch him at last, and tendering the glittering gold back to him would tell him of his error. And he would be so overcome with their honesty that he would take them by the hand and go back to their mother and ask questions of her,—what was her name?—why was she in such great distress? And when he heard the name he would lean up against the lamp-post quite overcome; and when they asked him what was the matter he would answer that he was their father's long-lost brother, and had been searching for them for years, as he was immensely wealthy and did not know what to do with his money. And thereupon he would adopt them all, and they would all live happily to the end of their days.

"Then why doesn't mama tell Dadda's bruvver now?" demanded the practical Weenie.

Phyl and Dolly glanced at her impatiently. That the father had no brother, long-lost or otherwise, was a detail they had not troubled about.

"Oh, well, it'll be an uncle or a cousin," they said, and ran on painting the brilliant future life they would lead, in colours as glowing as they had painted the other days dun.

It was on the first day that Phyl was up again that

they actually learned the great news. At tea-time Mrs. Conway ran into the nursery for a moment. She had been busy with the lawyer most of the afternoon, and now he and her own brother were staying for the evening that yet more business might be talked.

"I want you all to be very quiet and good," she said; "play here all the time, Phyl mustn't be in the draughts, and no one is to come running into the breakfast-room under any pretext."

"Mayn't we even come to dessert?" said Dolly. This had always been their privilege.

"There is no dessert," said the mother. "There is nothing but a very small leg of mutton, and an apple-pie, and some custards. Tell Harriet, Dolly, to look in the store-room, I think there is just one more pot of red currant-jelly for the meat."

She went to the door, then came back; her cheeks were flushed, her crinkly hair pushed back from her forehead as if with much and difficult thinking.

"Before you go to bed to-night you shall know everything," she said; "till then be good little chickies, and don't let me see a bit of you."

But there were four hours to bed-time,—how could they make the time endurable, confined within the limits of these four walls?

Yet on ordinary occasions it was a most resourceful room.

It was fairly large and well lighted, with a window

that had what all nurseries should have,—a deep, broad window-seat. Of necessary furniture there was nothing beyond a table, four or five chairs, an old horse-hair sofa, and two large cupboards. And all of it, by the earnest request of the three remaining inhabitants, was crowded down to one end, in order to leave the other quite bare for play. Phyl and Dolly had begged an old clothes-horse, and had coaxed Harriet into nailing some material over it. The big corner it had screened off from the room was entirely sacred to them; and Weenie, when they retired within it and extended no invitation to her, had no other course left but to stay outside and make a disturbing noise. For she was such a destructive small morsel that Mr. and Mrs. Conway, in the interests of the two to whom dolls were living breathing beings and the centres of passionate affections, had been obliged to join the coalition against her in this respect, and say she must not touch that corner without permission. They sought to recompense her for the interdict by giving her boxes of wooden and tin soldiers, boats and horses, and they begged the two elder little maids to be unselfish and not abuse the privilege.

Inside the screen the floor-space was covered with an old hearth-rug. The most imposing article of furniture was the bedstead. Mr. Conway had had it made by a carpenter three Christmases ago, and Mrs. Conway had made the clothing. Surely there never

was so beautiful a thing. It was made of cedar, and was large enough to accommodate at a pinch four dolls, seeing the habit of these diminutives is to lie perfectly straight and not sprawl about like humans. The head and foot were slightly carved, it had prettily-turned pillars, and beneath the mattress were white laths. The bed itself was of feathers, and the casing of blue Belgian tick exactly like "grown-up" beds. Then there came an under-blanket with a red button-holed edge, a beautiful sheet, two sweet tiny pillows in frilled pillow-cases, another sheet, another blanket (this one prettily stitched), and, crowning glory of all, a patchwork counterpane made of lovely bits of silk, and lined delicately with pale pink. There were even nightdress pockets, edged with lace, to lay upon it in the daytime.

Phyl and Dolly went to their corner to see their large families into bed as one means of filling the time this evening.

They folded all the tiny garments in stacks, and inducted even the most battered and headless specimens of dollhood into nightgowns.

"The sheets are very dirty," Dolly said; "we quite forgot, Phyl, it was washing day to-day. How'd it be if we do it now? We can dry the things on the fire-guard."

But Phyl had covered up the last of her offspring, and was bringing out a tattered copy of *The Arabian Nights*.

"I think we'd better read," she said, "then the time will go very quickly."

"Well, wait for me a second," Dolly said, hastily plaiting up the long golden hair of Constance, the one fashionable doll of the assembly. Then they lay down together on the hearth-rug, the book between them, and their chins propped in their hands.

"Oh," said the little lonely person outside the screen, "I've nosing to do, Dolly, le's wash the things and hang them upon the line? Le's come in, Phyl?"

"Hide the best little cups," whispered Phyl to Dolly.

"She'll bweak the mangle," whispered Dolly to Phil, "don't let's get it out."

"No, I won't," said the maligned young person, entering.

"Where's the tubs and the bucket?—le's play, I'm Jane. An' I must have the mangle, Dolly."

Phyl and Dolly sighed. They had their own particular ways of turning the garments inside out, and soaking and rinsing them; they knew just what things were worn then and needed gentle rubbing; it was a real hardship to remember their mother's words and let the careless little one in to help.

"It's a very small wash this week," Phyl said; "I don't think I shall put even Suey's pinafores in."

"When you look at them, the sheets and pillow-cases aren't so very dirty," Dolly said.

"'I tell you it's only a small wash this week,' Phyl said."

They gave Weenie two or three print frocks and a heap of under-linen.

"The tub isn't half full, dive me some more," said the young washerwoman, tucking her sleeves up to her shoulders, tying her handkerchief round her head, and turning up the front of her dress to look business-like.

"I tell you it's only a small wash this week," Phyl said.

"I know," said Weenie, pouting, "you fink I won't get your old clothes clean."

Without a doubt they did think so.

"Wash those first," Dolly said; "p'waps we'll find some more soon."

Weenie gathered up the things indicated, and one other thing, and went off to the end of the room to the window-seat that was used as a laundry.

She dragged both the tubs with her, and insisted upon being given possession of the mangle. When they demurred she looked at them reproachfully.

"I fought you promised mummie on Sunday that you would be good to me," she said.

So they sighed and gave it up to her—even tried to dole out the necessary stores with a show of cheerfulness—the pat of soap, the microscopic blue-bag, the soda, starch, and infinitesimal pegs. Then they fell down to their book again. The Prince of Persia was making his first visit to the palace of Schemselnihar, and how those children revelled in the gorgeous

colouring of the scene! The unstinted wealth of adjectives acted like intoxicants to their senses. They were not lying down face downwards on a hearth-rug in England; they were far away in that brilliant East, in a noble saloon the dome of which was supported by a hundred pillars of marble white as alabaster. The bases and chapiters of the pillars were adorned with four-footed beasts and birds of different sorts, gilded. In every space between the columns was a little alcove adorned in the same manner, and great vessels of china, crystal, jet, porphyry, agate, and other precious materials garnished with gold and jewels. The windows looked into the most delicious garden. Ten black women came towards them, carrying with much difficulty a throne of massy silver, curiously wrought; then twenty handsome ladies richly appareled alike, and playing on instruments. Lastly Schemselnihar herself, easily distinguished from the rest by her majestic air, as well as by a sort of mantle of a very fine stuff of gold and sky-blue, fastened to her shoulders over her other apparel, which was the most magnificent that could be imagined. It was of purple . . .

"Ugh!" said the voice of the distant washerwoman, "ah, ugh!" There was a sound of the spilling of much water, and the falling of something.

Phyl and Dolly scrambled to their feet and rushed out, to find Weenie's wash had been much more extensive than bargained for.

They were allowed to use the water from an old "puzzle" jug that stood on one of the cupboards, but Harriet had been careless enough this evening, with the demands of "company" on her mind, to leave her bowl of washing-up water on the table, and Weenie had utilized that instead, since it was warm.

She had washed all the dolls' clothes in it, they hung over the fire-guard, grey and greasy: there were two ancient wool antimacassars that were kept on the sofa when they were not doing duty as wraps for dolls or "ladies,"—she had washed them also and turned the water a queer shade of green. When she found her own pinafore was stained from the running wool she took it off and washed it too: when she found her white woollen frock was in the same condition she struggled out of it and dipped it in the basin and soaped and rinsed it vigorously, standing all the time on a chair. The clattering sound was caused by the chair slipping aside, and "down tumbled baby and white frock and all."

Phyl and Dolly scolded energetically, as became elder sisters.

Then suddenly Phyl gave a scream of absolute horror and flew to the fire-guard. Hanging over it to dry, its gay colours running streakily into each other, its delicate lining turned a nondescript hue, was their cherished dolls' counterpane.

"What's the matter?" said Weenie wonderingly.

But Phyl and Dolly had burst into tears and

rushed together for the first overwhelming minute of bitter sorrow.

Weenie ran to them confidently, perfect joy on her face.

"The mangle isn't broked," she said, "it's nosing but the handle tomed off. Mover 'll stick it on again; don't cry, Dolly."

Then they looked at her innocent face more in anger than in sorrow. Phyl even pushed her roughly away.

"You're a bad, wicked, horrid girl," she said.

Weenie lost her balance and staggered against Dolly.

"You're a howid, wicked, bad girl," said Dolly, and pushed her back.

The return push gave her into Phyl's power again. That young person caught her by her bare shoulders and gave her a slight shake.

"How dare you touch our things?" she said.

Dolly ran to her and gave her another little shake.

"How dare you touch our things?" she said.

Weenie burst into tears, the heartbroken tears of injured innocence. She had not dreamed of doing injury to the counterpane; it had seemed a beautiful thing to her to take it surreptitiously and wash it so well for them; she had thought they would be delighted when they saw it fresh and clean, for they had been saying the lining was getting dirty for a long time.

She flung herself down in a miserable shivering heap on the floor.

But the elder girls left her alone, and took their anger and the counterpane behind the screen.

She cried for nearly ten minutes before their wrath cooled. Then the pitifulness of her sobbings suddenly softened their hearts. They ran out to her.

"Poor old Weenie," Dolly said; "never mind, Weenie, it doesn't matter."

Weenie clung to her convulsively, she had sobbed herself quite ill.

Phyl ran to the press where the clothes were kept and found a frock and pinafore; she was reproaching herself bitterly for the blue little arms and chattering teeth.

"Darling little Weenie," she said, "here, let Phyl put this on—don't cry so, baby sweet,—we aren't angry a bit now, are we, Dolly? It doesn't matter a scrap, does it, Dolly?"

"Not a scwap," said Dolly eagerly.

They pulled her to the fire, and Phyl leaned perilously over the guard and poked till the flames leaped up warmly; they rubbed her perishing little hands, they petted and kissed her and called themselves all sorts of names for being so unkind to her.

"We'll do anything, Weenie—*anything*," said Phyl distractedly, when the convulsive sobbing still continued.

Weenie was sufficiently recovered to press the advantage.

"Give me the l-little m-mangle for my ownty own," she said.

They promised to her cheerfully.

"An' le's make ice-cream an' have a p-p-party."

They set to work to obey her.

They spread tea-towels over two chairs and laid out their best dinner-set that contained a soup-tureen and a sauce-boat in addition to the usual things. Phyl made soup of three currants and weak tea, Dolly cut an apple into thin slices, arranged them in slanting piles on a small plate, and called it bread-and-butter.

Weenie herself stirred flour-and-water and sugar together into a lump of dough and then stuck four currants into it; that was the pudding. Phyl mixed sugar-and-water together for sauce.

Then came the *chef-d'œuvre*. They listened at the door to make sure no footsteps approached; then Dolly stealthily opened the window, leaned out and got a handful or two of snow from the creeper outside. They put it on a plate and stirred sugar into it; then they reached down the precious bottle of cochineal their mother had given them, and coloured it a pale, lovely pink.

They dressed all the dolls in their very best and brought them to the feast. Even Weenie's "Molly Coddles" was hunted up and introduced into a gar-

ment. She was Weenie's only doll—a gaunt, wooden one with a black painted head and vividly red cheeks.

In the beginning she had possessed the jointed wooden legs and arms that are usually found on her species; but Weenie had thought them troublesome and pulled them off. The stump of a body and the big head she used variously as a horse, a hammer, a ship, and a missile. Dolly to-day, however, wrapped the poor wreck in Jennie's second-best party cloak, and she was propped up at the table among her betters.

How delicious was that pink ice-cream, eaten off inch-wide plates, with microscopic tin spoons! What delicate flavour that soup had, especially when Phyl chopped up very small a leaf of the outside creeper and made the effect still more realistic? Nothing could have been more enjoyable than that rather dirty-looking ball of dough, yclept a pudding, with the sweet sauce, also coloured pink, poured over it.

Weenie was beamingly happy again, and Phyl and Dolly were enjoying themselves so intensely that all thought of the counterpane faded from their minds.

"But, oh," cried Phyl, "I don't think Suey ought to have another ice-cream, she's had five, and it was only yesterday she had whooping-cough and perelsis."

"Give it to my old Molly Coddles," said Weenie, and kissed her poor puppet in an unusual burst of

tenderness,—"poor old Molly, I wisht you'd let her sleep in the bed with Jennie and Suey,—she hasn't got nowhere to sleep."

The door opened and the mother came in.

Weenie greeted her hilariously.

"Come an' have some ice-cream, mummie," she cried, "twickerly, twickerly, or Molly 'll eat it all."

"We are going to Australia."

But Phyl and Dolly dropped their dolls and rushed to their mother with parted lips and eagerly questioning eyes.

Mrs. Conway's face was a little pale, but her hair was no longer pushed back, and worry-wrinkles had smoothed themselves from the forehead.

Her eyes looked brave and calm and smiling, there was no fear in them at all.

"Oh, what is it?" Phyl cried; "it is a big, big thing, I know, I know."

The mother sat down in a chair while they pressed round her.

"Yes, it is rather a big thing," she said. "In one month, little girls, we are going to Australia."

CHAPTER IX

TRAVELS IN FOREIGN COUNTRIES

SURELY this was a great step Mrs. Conway had decided, almost by herself, upon taking? To cut herself adrift from friends and relatives, to leave this land of her birth, and her father's and children's births, to cross those thousands and thousands of miles of sea and to start life entirely afresh in some strange country, a solitary woman with three little children depending upon her for their very bread.

Sometimes her heart grew faint at the thought of the immensity of her responsibilities. Then to strengthen herself she would sum up the reasons that urged her to take such a step.

Phyl's increasing delicacy had made the doctor look very grave.

During the last illness of Mr. Conway and while death actually hovered about the place he had seen the uselessness of suggesting any change for the frail little girl. But now that all was over and the mother was desolately free, he told her, gently enough, but

with no hesitation, that if she remained in England her eldest daughter could not live.

Every winter found the chest more and more weak and exposed to the inclement weather. The slight colds that Dolly and Weenie caught and flung off so easily were each of them in Phyl's case a menacing danger.

Mrs. Conway contended, day after day, with the problem. If she were rich she could fly off with her darling at the approach of winter to Southern France or the warm slopes of Italy.

But how could a widow, almost destitute, contend against so fierce and relentless a foe as the English climate?

When all business affairs had been wound up and all legalities finished with, she found there remained to her nothing in the world but the four hundred pounds left of Phyl's and Dolly's little fortune. She was pondering on the possibility of eking out an existence on that in some cheap French village, when the treacherous November wind caught the child again, and made the doctor more and more convinced that the young life would not flicker very much longer unless some radical change were wrought.

"The only hope I can hold out to you, Mrs. Conway," he said at last, "is that you should take the little girl for a long sea voyage. And keep her away for all time from these vile winters."

Mrs. Conway explained her straitened means, and

how four hundred was the whole of her worldly wealth.

"Well, many would be glad of that amount," he said thoughtfully; "of course you will have to work for your children, but that"—he looked at her quiet, resolute face and her mouth's firm lines—"I know you are prepared for. Has Australia ever suggested itself to you?"

Mrs. Conway gasped a little at the boldness of the idea, but the doctor had so much to say in favour of the new land, the chances for work there, the climate, the voyage that would give Phyl a new lease of life, that when he went away she sat thinking, thinking for hours.

She did not ask many people's advice; the friend and lawyer of the family, her brother, and one or two other relatives and friends, came to the quiet Warwickshire home and went into the matter gravely with her; no one actually advised against it since poor Phyllida's life seemed at stake, but no one was very sanguine. Still there seemed no other thing on earth to be done, and in one more week Mrs. Conway had gathered up her courage and finally decided upon the step.

It took quite a long time that first night to make the children's queer little heads realize all that the wonderful statement meant. Then Weenie was the only one who chattered; Phyl and Dolly, with eyes lustrous with excitement, only gazed at each other

silently while the splendid thing revolved in their heads.

"Just like the Swiss Family Wobinson," Dolly said at last in a low, odd voice. "Oh, Phyl, don't you hope we'll be wecked?"

"Oh, thank you, Dolly, but I think we'll ask to be excused luxuries like that," said Mrs. Conway. "I thought you objected so strongly a week ago to starving to death—where would be the difference?"

"Oh!" Dolly said, "of course I didn't mean I hoped we'd get dwowned. Only just wecked on a dear little island where there were cocoa-nuts and things."

But Mrs. Conway asked to be spared even that small diversion.

"I only wish we could go over in a train," she said ruefully, for she had an unconquerable horror of the sea, though the small ones never knew it.

Then she started up to go back to the letters and other work that pressed so heavily.

"It is nearly nine," she said, "all of you run to bed at once. But I suppose you would never go to sleep without a little more talk. Phyl, if I leave you my watch, will you make Weenie wrap up and get into my bed at ten, and go to sleep yourselves—faithfully now?"

Phyl promised to send Weenie off.

"And I'll shut my eyes hard," she said, "but I shall never go to sleep again, shall you, Dolly?"

"Never," said Dolly with a deep breath.

Once in bed they reviewed the situation from every possible—and impossible—standpoint. They had to picture the ship and the idea of themselves, not the personages of romance they so often were, but their ordinary every-day selves, sailing and sailing away over blue waters to a land where the sun shone always. They had to consider what dolls, books, and clothes they would take; they had to wonder what cousin this and Alice and Nellie that would think. They had to giggle quietly at the idea of going to sleep in bunk beds, one on top of the other, and to shudder pleasurably at the thought of storms, and whales, and ships on fire, water-spouts, and similar dangers that they doubted not lay in wait for those who went down to the sea in ships.

They had to piece together their meagre information of that far-away country of the sun, and make a tangible place of it. But so difficult this proved, Dolly slipped on her blue felt slippers and bright red dressing-gown and stole down the landing to the small book-room, where were stored the atlases and the *Book of Travels in Foreign Countries.*

The only atlas she could find, however, in the hurry was an American one her father had often laughed at, and had wondered in what way he had come possessed of it. It began with a very large and complete map of N. America; then followed one of S. America, then there came a succession of twenty or thirty pages of the various States,

even some of the smallest, least important ones, with all the most insignificant towns and villages carefully marked.

Somewhere near the end of the book the compiler seemed to recollect there was a little continent called Europe, and he struck in a bald map of it, with the British Islands lurking indistinctly to the west. Asia and Africa too he seemed to include incidentally, but Australia had been quite beneath his notice, and only occurred as an almost unmarked island in the last map of all, Oceana.

The little girls were not much wiser after a study of this remarkable work: so they plunged into *Travels in Foreign Countries* in the thirstiest way, quite heedless that the edition was one of the early fifties, and had been prized by their father chiefly for that fact. Strange things they learned from it; the natives were chocolate-coloured and fought with boomerangs; bushrangers troubled the country greatly; these were white outlaws, they found, who hid in the bush and then made raids on the stations.

"You'd hardly think they'd be civilized enough there for railways, would you?" Phyl remarked by the way. Gold mines it seemed were very plentiful; the children paused to dilate on how pleasant a thing it would be, when money was running short, to go outside the thatched hut (they had agreed they would build this themselves, with perhaps a little aid from

some friendly native), and dig with a "tomahawk" for a few minutes till a nugget or two was unearthed.

Sheep, too, seemed numerous—also snakes and strange-looking birds called emus; an unearthly-looking thing with an unearthly name—*Ornithorhynchus paradoxus*, or the duck-billed platypus; a strange unfinished-looking beast with two long legs at the back, the rudiments of two other legs at the front, and half-way down its great length a pouch containing a wee edition of itself nibbling a bit of grass—"kangaroo or wallaby" said the note underneath,—"a harmless animal for all its looks; indeed, it is frequently kept by squatters' children for a pet just as English children keep cats."

"How would you like *that* for a pet, instead of Old Pussy Long Tail, Weenie?" said Phyl, displaying it.

But Weenie was so wofully tired and excited and unhinged that she burst into frightened tears, and declared her intention of hiding in the cellar instead of going on the ship.

The distraction brought Phyl back to England and remembrance again. She put a hasty hand out for the watch, and her horrified eyes found the hands at a quarter to eleven.

"It was only half-past nine when I looked last," she gasped, "and it was only about ten minutes ago."

"P—waps the hour-hand has slipped down," suggested Dolly anxiously.

Phyl leaned over the table and blew the light out hastily.

"For goodness' sake let's say our prayers at once," she said. "What *will* mother say when we tell her? Weenie, kneel up here quickly, pet, and then run off to your own bed."

Weenie tumbled up wearily on the pillow.

"Bless me and everybody, God, and let me find my sreepence again; that's all, please, Phyl."

Dolly saw her into the other room, tucked the clothes round her and left her asleep before she could cross back again and begin her own devotions. Strange prayers these small girls prayed.

They had a regular formula, in which "Our Father" came first and made them feel reverence, yet also fear, for the all-powerful God. Then they said the "Gentle Jesus" of their younger days, and loved with a warm, living love that tender Shepherd who "in the Kingdom of His grace, gives a little child a place."

And then came prayers begging for blessings individually for a number of relations and friends in an ascending order of affection.

As, for instance — "Bless Jane and Harriet (or Hay'at) and cook and old John; bless dear cousins Edith and Mary and Maurice and dear little Cousin Annie, and let poor Alice Partridge's back get better soon. Bless dear Aunt Margaret and dearest Aunt Ella, and—bless Aunt Anne" (the honest young tongues could *not* say dear to this severe, unbend-

ing sister of Mr. Conway's). "Bless darling, darling little Weenie, and Dolly (or Phyl). Bless darling, darling, precious, sweet little mother, and make her quite well and strong on earth and very happy." (They added the "on earth," for they knew, alas! that, like both the fathers they had lost, she might be "well and strong" and yet not be on earth.) And such was their horror now of death and the pain for the ones left behind, that they added, sometimes with trembling lips, "And pray, dear Lord, don't let any of us die by ourselves, but let us all fall dead together."

A petition or two then came of a purely private nature, for Christ was a tender Father to them, and they put up their wants in perfect faith, however trivial they were.

"Oh, please," Dolly would pray, "if it is not wrong to ask, dear Jesus, will you let me say my R's quite stwaight like everybody says them." This was her keenest trouble.

"Let me," was Phyl's petition at one time, "have quite straight hair, dear God, and a nose like Clara Cameron's. And let us be good to mama, and grow up very quickly, and be able to do plenty of work to help her."

Such long prayers Phyl used to say; the two always knelt at the same time by the side of their bed, and began together, but Dolly had always finished first. She used to glance sideways at Phyl

and wish she too could think of so many things to say. And Phyl—surely it could not have been just to show the superiority of her extra years—used to kneel motionless with her pale face bent over her pale hands so long that Dolly's respect for her increased almost nightly. She used to try and try herself to think of other things to add to keep her praying just as long as her sister, but after many vain efforts gave it up, and added instead at the very end of all her prayers—"And please, dear Jesus, let me have said everything Phyl has said."

To-night when prayers were finished, and they lay down with their arms around each other as usual, they could not get to sleep, for their broken promise pressed so heavily on their consciences they felt they could not wait until morning to confess to their mother. So after a time of silent tossing and sighs—they would not infringe further by any speech—Phyl sat up.

"You'll just have to go down and tell mama now, Dolly," she said. "I'd like to go myself, only I suppose it would worry her a lot if I got another cold."

So Dolly slipped out of bed and crept down-stairs, this time forgetful of the warm dressing-gown and gay blue shoes.

"Mama," she whispered, creeping like a white ghost across the room where her mother sat surrounded with papers, "we forgot, we're very sowy, we've bwoken our pwomise."

Mrs. Conway's colour had flown at the soft footsteps and the sudden voice. But the forgiveness was given very soon, for she remembered being a child herself, and had not forgotten how mysteriously time used then to fly away. She wrapped her daughter round in a big shawl. "Are you sleepy, Dolly?" she said.

"Mama, we forgot,—we're very sowy."

Dolly's wide eyes and eager lips gave quick denial.

"I want one of my girlies to-night," the poor mother said, and her lips trembled so and her eyelashes were so wet, Dolly knew just how lonely and grieving and anxious she was. So they sat on the sofa and had a little talk, and a cuddle, and they kissed each other often, and said low, tender things

to each other just as lovers might have done, and the ache in the mother's heart passed away.

"Phyl will have gone to sleep without you," Mrs. Conway said at last—"I think you must go now, sweetheart; I will come too, myself, when I have put these papers away."

But Dolly petitioned to stay till that was done, and watched with unweary eyes till the litter had all gone.

Then "Mama," she said suddenly, and it was not relevant to anything that had been said that evening, or indeed for days, but only to a want that had pressed sorely at her heart for two months, "shall we have new dresses to go to Australia in?"

Mrs. Conway smiled.

"I think it is highly probable they will be necessary," she said; "I saw Phyl's elbow nearly through her house-frock this morning."

"Oh, mama!"—and the child rushed and buried her face on her mother's arm again—"Oh, mama, need I take my grey one?"

The mother was much surprised. "That pretty little frock," she said; "it is the nicest you have, dear, and not half worn out, is it?"

"N—no," said Dolly, but a painful red was in her cheeks.

"Oh, please, please, mama, don't let me take it,—oh, couldn't you give it away now? I've had it for long enough, and long enough—oh, please, mama."

"But what is the matter with it that you dislike it so?" said Mrs. Conway, puzzled.

Dolly's voice was very low. "It isn't black," she said.

"But it has a black sash, and black trimmings," said Mrs. Conway.

"Phyl's is all black," Dolly whispered.

"But what of that, my little girl?"

Dolly's head pressed closer. "It seems as if I don't care as much as Phyl," she whispered, and one tear fell right over her gold-brown lashes and down her cheek.

Then the mother understood the frequent pain she had unknowingly caused the child by a small economy she had practised when the mourning was made.

Dolly had had a grey frock trimmed with blue, and at the time of Mr. Conway's death it was almost new. Phyl's blue and crimson and brown frocks had all been laid aside, and also Dolly's other coloured ones. But the grey one the mother had told the dressmaker to take the blue from, and substitute black, and it would make a useful house-frock.

Years after when Dolly looked back to her childish days that trouble was clearest remembered of all. But she had said nothing then, for the mother had said it would "save a little."

But to contemplate taking it to Australia with her broke down her fortitude, and for the first time Mrs. Conway understood what a real grief it had been.

"To-morrow we will send it to Mrs. Jones for her little girl," she said; "why didn't you tell me before, darling?"

But Dolly only clung closer and spoke no word, and they went to bed together.

CHAPTER X

THE LAST CHRISTMAS IN ENGLAND

In after days the last month spent in England seemed like a dream to the children. There was a fortnight during which packing-cases and new flat cabin-trunks came to the house, and were filled with a multitudinous collection of things. When all the stacks of garments, little and big, were ready, Mrs. Conway went in and out of the different rooms, the little girls at her heels, fingering an ornament here she felt she must take, a book there, looking with moist eyes at a picture that had looked down on her most of her life. Yet she did not wish to cumber herself with unnecessary luggage, so the selection had to be a small one. There were two tall silver candlesticks, snuffer-dish, and snuffers she could not leave behind.

"My mother gave them to me when I was married, and said I was to give them to my eldest daughter when *she* married," she said, "for her mother had given them to her, and before that, *her* mother had given them to *her*."

"Oh, of course you must take them," said Phyl, and felt added dignity that she had one of her wedding presents before her.

"The cake-basket is not quite so old; but that shall be for Dolly," the mother said, and lifted up the silver basket Dolly had always admired ardently.

There were tears in Weenie's voice.

"When I gets married," she said, "what's you got for me?"

Mrs. Conway found a cream-jug with a handsome handle.

"Did Dranma's Dranma's have it?" was Weenie's critical question.

"Yes," said Mrs. Conway.

"Zen I won't have it," said Miss Weenie. "Don't want nasty old fings for my wesing present. Want nicey new fings."

So the mother found a butter-dish that possessed the necessary qualification, and, to make the gift larger, a silver folding fruit-knife that Mrs. Conway had always used was added to it.

"Now I have wedding presents for you all," she said; "so no more silver, except spoons and forks." Only a few books were to go, she said, just one small boxful. They might choose twelve each, and she herself would select the rest.

A whole day flew, of course, in the choosing, and then the stacks carried into the big bedroom for packing were frequently disarranged for some change to

be made, so hard was the decision. Amongst those finally packed were *The Wide, Wide World*, a little brown, shabby volume that was Phyl's chiefest treasure, and the first book she had possessed, *Little Women*, *Alice in Wonderland* and *In the Looking-Glass*, *Ivanhoe*, *Andersen's Fairy Tales*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, two or three other books of Fairy Tales, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Readings with the Poets*, *Jessica's First Prayer*, Macaulay's *Lays of Rome*, *The Swiss Family Robinson*, *The Lamplighter*, *Misunderstood*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Scottish Chiefs*, *The Arabian Nights*, an annual or two, *Little Wideawake*, which was Dolly's first book, and a volume or two of *Sunshine*.

The stack of dull-covered lesson-books was a small one, and such was the mother's pre-occupation she did not notice. There were *Mangnall's Questions* and *Stepping Stones*, books so heartily hated, their sense of duty was too keen to leave them behind. There was *Mary's Grammar*, that once they had been attached to by the seeming innocence of its stories, but that on further acquaintance they mistrusted entirely as being a species of powder in jam. There was *Butter's Spelling Book*, and a blue geography in the question and answer form. Also a very thin atlas, and the one of the two table-books they possessed that did *not* contain "weights and measures."

The days leapt along; the last boxes were corded. All good-byes to friends had been said. "Yesterday

was Monday," Phyl said once in surprise, "and now to-day's Saturday!" and even the mother agreed with her.

There came the final move. The boxes went early, then breakfast came—a strange meal, eaten without a table-cloth, and with cups and plates that no longer belonged to them—breakfast with a world grey to blackness out-of-doors, and within a fire that refused to burn up so early, and gas that flickered as if to help the melancholy effect. Then a four-wheeled cab for the long drive to the station; the backward, fearful glance of the three at the old, quiet, dull-coloured house, and Harriet standing waving there, red-eyed; then the forward, eager one at the thought of the life a-stretch.

A long journey in the express train to London. Phyl had learned its rate was sixty miles an hour, and was staggered by the announcement, for ordinary trains she found ran only thirty to forty.

"We'll have to catch hold of something very hard," she told her sisters, drawing a long breath at the beginning, "or we'll be whirled out of our seats and choked, I expect."

All three were somewhat disappointed to find none of these things happened, and that the locomotion seemed very little different from that to which they had been accustomed on their visits to the seaside. The roar and lights of a great station, where it seemed one half of the world was rushing to catch trains,

and the other half had come to see them off and wave good-bye; then a stuffy big cab again.

One night in the big, quiet hotel, where the elder little maids had stayed once before in wealthier days on a visit to the great capital, the hotel that seemed so fascinating a fairyland to them, they had brought it into their play for months afterwards, and shed their fairy wings in order to play chambermaids and waiters. Indeed, there had been a Sunday evening when Dolly, brought to book for her sins, had grown pink with shame, and told how "when it was sermon time and she couldn't understand, she couldn't help thinking how lovely the church would be to play 'hotel' in." And Phyl, equally pink, had confessed also to imagining she was the boy chalking the number of each bedroom on the boots outside.

"If the pews hadn't had numbers on like those bedrooms, I shouldn't have thought of it," she added excusingly.

Breakfast at the big hotel, a white world just becoming soiled and smirched outside. A dignified waiter behind the chairs of the three little maids. "Devilled kidneys, chops and tomato-sauce, York ham, eggs *aux Champignons*, or fried soles?" he says rapidly to Dolly. Dolly gives a slight gasp. It has been the unalterable rule of her life to let Phyl decide questions like these. Once even when she and Phyl were invited out to tea, and she was asked first what she would have, she grew red and hesitated, and

finally said in a very shy whisper, "I'll wait and see what Phyl has, please."

"Devilled kidneys, chops and tomato-sauce, York ham," begins the man again.

"Fried soles," says Phyl, who has deliberated thoughtfully.

"Fwied soles," says Dolly, relievedly.

"Fried soles, an' egg, an' chop, an' devilly," says Weenie.

"Fried soles, an' egg, an' chop, an' devilly," says Weenie.

But after breakfast the mother goes off to find a lodging much less expensive for the last ten days. They take an omnibus and drive towards the East End to a tall shabby house that says "Apartments," and stands in a row of others in a long, quiet,

shabby street. It is not very far away from the Docks, a most necessary qualification, for every day now they all go to look over the great ships that lean against the black wharves as if resting before they fight their way over the seas again.

Mrs. Conway had fancied that being poor people now they could go with the poor third-class across those seas, and so save many pounds out of those few hundreds of hers. But when she sees it, and the motley crowd of nationalities assembled there on a departing boat, she shrinks from such a step. The shipping agent she has approached is kindly and interested in the young widow and her little girls. He tells her it is impossible for her to contemplate it. She must go second-class; but he will stretch a point, and imagine Weenie is two years younger than she is—in fact, he will allow the three children to go on one adult ticket.

"But I isn't two years younger than I is," Weenie says agitatedly. Her sharp ears have heard the conversation, and she fears she is to be deprived of some of her rights.

"Yes you are," says the gentleman solemnly. "You are only two, and a very fine little girl for your age." And he writes out the necessary papers.

The fortnight shortens; in three days it will be Christmas; in seven days they sail. They go to see some inexpensive sights—the Crystal and Alexandra Palaces, the Zoo, Madame Tussaud's, the Tower of

London, with the wonderful armour and the Crown Jewels.

Christmas Day. The landlady has intimated to all her boarders that she expects them to dine out in respect for the day, and allow her some rest. Mrs. Conway and the children muffle up to their eyes. All that can be seen of Phyl are two excited blue eyes and the curl or two that peep from under the seal-cap.

Outside there is no snow, only a black drift here and there. A heavy yellow fog obscures everything. Once Weenie strays, and is quite lost for the space of three minutes, during which the greatest excitement and anxiety prevail; finally she is found again, weeping bitterly, not six feet away. After that they all hold each other carefully and walk four abreast, not a difficult thing, for most of the world is cosily indoors to-day.

They go to St. Paul's and hear the Christmas anthem. The great solemn place is not a quarter full; the air hangs chill and strange; the light is dim in the far-away aisles and pews, but near the altar gas is burning.

When the great organ rolls vibratingly through all the place, and the far-off voices of the choristers rise to the huge domed roof and die away, Phyl and Dolly grip each other's hands very tightly, their throats swell, and they badly want to cry; though why they have no idea. But Weenie sniggers during most of the service, for she has put one of the little flat

hassocks on top of another, and, standing on the erection, tries to imagine she is as tall as her mother.

"These funny little hassocks are much smaller than those at our old church," she announced audibly, once.

Out in the dreary streets again. The emotional mood of Phyl and Dolly has passed, and they profess themselves dying of hunger, and enter into a pleasurable discussion as to what they will have to eat.

Mrs. Conway has supposed that plenty of restaurants will be open, and that they will be able to get a dinner "Christmassy" enough to satisfy the children, and still inexpensive. But up and down streets they go, anxiously scanning signs, and not one of the places is open; the mother's heart begins to fail her. She has been obliged to forego hung stockings, Christmas-tree, —all the bright merriment of the season. Surely she will not have to let her little ones go without their dinner.

"It won't matter about holly and burning fire around the dish for once, if we can only have the pudding," Phyl remarks; half-an-hour ago she had said pudding without those accompaniments was not pudding at all.

"We could do without vegetables and things if only they could let us have turkey, or fowl, or something," said Dolly.

Weenie begins to cry for sheer need of something to eat.

Up streets, down streets—the mother dare not go

too far afield for fear of losing her bearings entirely in this thick wretched fog—and all this part of the world shows blank shuttered windows and inhospitably closed doors. At last they find a place where the door, though not open to invite customers, is ajar.

There is a delicious fragrance of roast goose in the foggy air outside, and they all sniff it luxuriously.

The mother pushes open the door, and they troop after her in eager anticipation. But the shopkeeper is far from pleased at this advent.

"I am not prepared for customers to-day," she says shortly, "the door was left open by accident."

"But I can smell roast goose," Phyl says, excitedly.

"So can I," says Dolly.

"An' me," cries Weenie.

"Surely you can prepare a meal of some kind for us," says the mother. "I will pay you well for your trouble"—she has grown quite reckless.

"If there is plenty of goose, we can do without pudding," says Phyl.

"The goose is cooked to order," the woman returns. "There's a party of gents coming in, and the vegetables and pudding is for them too."

"They wouldn't miss a leg or two," Phyl says imploringly. "Oh, surely they don't want it *all!*"

"There are five of them," says the woman inexorably. "I couldn't possibly touch it, nor yet break the pudding."

Weenie begins to cry afresh.

"I wants my dinner," she says again and again and again between her tears.

"Have you nothing at all in the house?" poor Mrs. Conway says. "Is there nowhere near you could send for anything? My little girls are quite hungry."

The woman seems to find it hard to understand how it comes about that they are hungry and wandering about on such a day; they are well-dressed, and very warmly wrapped up. But when the mother begs her again to do her best to get them a meal, she consents reluctantly.

"You'll have to take the back room," she says, "the gents have engaged the front one."

"We don't mind if it's the kitchen," says Dolly joyously, "do we, Phyl?"

They are led into a room full of small oil-clothed tables, with a common-looking cruet, a jug of water, and a glass bowl filled with lumps of sugar in the centre of each. The children try the tables one after the other, and finally seat themselves at a round one that holds a dirty menu-card.

In the interval during which the woman goes very reluctantly to "do her best," they study this card, and speculate as to what the "best" will be.

"If they have three soups, roast beef, curry and veal pie, custard-pudding and fritters, on common days," says Phyl, "surely they can find something nice when it's Christmas Day."

"But the woman says she has nothing at all in her pantry," the mother says.

"She said she'd send to the butcher's by the back door," contends Dolly.

"But what could she get there to cook quickly?" says the mother; "you wouldn't like to wait for a joint of beef to be cooked, would you? I am greatly afraid it will be nothing better than chops."

And nothing better it is, after a weary twenty minutes' wait. The little girls' faces fall greatly when the harassed-looking woman appears with a tray that contains nothing more than a dish of rather burnt-looking chops, and a plate loaded with potatoes. But they brighten when the mother requests that instead of one large one, four little tea-pots shall be brought, so that each may pour out for herself.

For pudding, they have hastily stewed prunes, a box of figs, plenty of bread-and-butter, and strawberry-jam. And so hungry has the chill air made them, they are surprised to find they have greatly enjoyed their Christmas dinner.

They go back to the boarding-house early in the afternoon. There are no fires in sitting-room or dining-room, so they betake themselves to their bedroom and light the gas, and cuddle close together and talk of Australia.

And one more Christmas Day is a thing of the past.

CHAPTER XI

'GOING DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS'

"PHYL," said an urgent whisper very early one morning—"oh, Phyl, *do* wake up, you don't know *what* you're missing."

Phyl opened a very sleepy pair of eyes and found Dolly's face at a curious distance above her. A red swollen face it was—almost a purple in fact.

"Your eyes 'll drop out in a minute," was the elder sister's remark, delivered sleepily. And indeed there seemed some danger of that horrible accident happening, for Dolly had leaned her body so far out of her top bunk that her head was not very far from Phyl's.

"Well, wake up then," she said.

"You come down here," Phyl said, her eyes fast shut again.

"Oh," said Dolly, "yours is a horrid berth, come up here, Phyl, there are the loveliest, wonderfullest things to see."

Then Phyl remembered they were at last, after all

the weeks and weeks of anticipation and waiting, actually at sea, and was amazed to think that she could have been unwilling to wake. In a twinkling she flung back the clothes, and climbed the mahogany ladder that reached to Dolly's berth.

The two rough golden heads come very close together as they peep out of the port-hole. "The loveliest, wonderfullest things" were one moment the middle of the grey-green waves, and the next a glimpse of grey rain.

"Isn't it *lovely?*" Dolly said, rapturously.

Phyl's only but perfectly satisfactory answer was a deep-drawn sigh of intense happiness.

"What woke me," whispered Dolly, "was, I felt somebody's arm stretched across me, and it was the thin steward that gave Weenie the crystallized fruit, and he just screwed up the window and walked out again."

"He should have sent the stewardess in," said Phyl, with a becoming sense of propriety. "I wonder why he shut it; last night they said we might leave it open."

"P'waps we're in deeper water now," suggested Dolly.

The whispering had not wakened either the mother or Weenie. There was a berth just above Mrs. Conway's, but it had not been disturbed; Weenie was a prey to queer tremors of fear that first strange night, so Mrs. Conway slept with her in her arms. The dear

dark head was cuddled close up to the mother's shoulder, the dark eyelashes lay peacefully on the round cheeks, the red babyish lips were apart. The mother was fast asleep, one protecting arm round her youngest daughter.

"They won't wake for long enough and long enough," said Dolly; "let's get dressed and have a peep outside."

They put their clothes on awkwardly; it was a difficult thing to manage, both sitting there in that top berth, but they dare not trust the floor, for last night, undressing, they had made a great noise in tumbling about. At last they were ready, and softly opening the door, they stole out into the long strange saloon. For some time they hung close to their own door, there were so many stewards moving backwards and forwards preparing the many tables for breakfast, that they felt timid. But at last confidence came to them, and having found with their eyes the steps that led up to the deck, they shyly let their feet follow. They went up timidly, and backwards—a friend having told them that was the proper way to descend, and they imagined for themselves it must consequently be the best mode of ascent. The awkward mode of progression took some time, and a boy in a nautical cap, who had been worrying the stewards, laughed aloud at them.

They had both secretly imagined a scene of wonderful beauty would burst upon their delighted eyes

as soon as they gained the deck. Phyl's mental vision had included a bright blue sea with whales spouting in various parts, albatrosses flying overhead, and perhaps a majestic iceberg in the distance. Dolly had a dear notion that there would be islands dotted about with cocoanut palms waving gracefully, and black people rowing about in little boats.

And oh! such a woefully dull picture they saw! They were barely out of the mouth of the Thames; the sea was grey, the sky grey, the coast dingy. There were numbers of other boats near—fishing-smacks with brown patched sails, long untidy-looking schooners, two or three big steamers coming in, all their gay paint washed off, one with a mast broken, and a very storm-beaten air about her.

Phyl gulped down a tear, the corners of Dolly's smiling mouth fell down, down.

Then "Oh!" Phyl cried, "just look, Dolly, see the sailors sitting up there on the mast! Oh! look, there goes another one—did you *ever* see any one climb like that?"

Dolly's mouth corners came up at this interesting sight.

"What are they doing?" she said; "are they going to put sails up?"

Phyl always assumed knowledge, even though she had it not.

"What do *we* want with sails?" she said, "this is a steamship, Dolly, you goose. I expect those sailors

have to sit up there for punishment, that's the way captains always punish sailors when they've been doing anything wrong."

"He—he—he!" laughed the fiendish boy in a nautical cap behind them.

They both looked greatly agitated, for they had an unconquerable dread of boys, and they hurried off to the furthermost end of the deck, though there was no longer any shelter there.

"Let's get up these steps quickly, Phyl," whispered Dolly, "he's coming after us."

They went up hurriedly, even forgetting to walk backwards. Up here there was another pleasant deck, with awnings stretched against the sun and rain: they decided this should be the place where they would always play.

"We could make the loveliest little kitchen in this corner," Dolly said, running to a tempting place under the companion-ladder that led to the bridge.

"Let's go up these other steps," said Phil, "it's so high up there we might see lots of things we can't see down here."

They began the ascent, but Dolly, who was behind, caught sight of a notice that said passengers were forbidden to go on the bridge.

She grasped Phyl's frock in a tumult of fear to drag her back, and at the same time a short red-haired man with a blue coat trimmed with gold lace and gold buttons, and a cap with a gold and red sort

of emblem, paused in his walk up and down above, and noticed them.

"What are you doing here?" he said, and his voice was so used to shouting in the wind that it thrilled them with horror, it sounded so loud and fierce. "If you don't go back at once I shall put you in irons."

Go back at once! They fairly fell down the remaining steps and scudded across the deck like a pair of terrified rabbits. The officer himself smiled as he looked after their flying curls, and remembered the momentary look of terror on the faces that had looked up at him.

They stood still to recover themselves in the sheltered corner that Dolly had thought would make so ideal a kitchen. Their faces were quite pale at the thought of their narrow escape, and their knees were trembling dreadfully.

"Well," said a voice behind them, and turning, they saw the dreadful boy, "I wouldn't be you kids for anything—a nice thing *you've* let yourselves in for."

"W—what?" said Phyl, trying to stand her ground.

"He only said if we didn't go back he w—would ——" said Dolly, with teeth almost chattering.

The boy came closer to them and spoke in a lower tone, for there were a couple of apprentices near. "You're second-class passengers, aren't you?" he said.

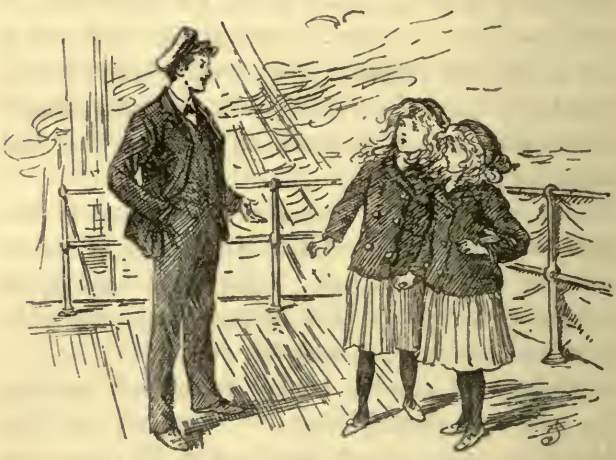
"Yes," said Phyl.

"Very well," said the boy, "you're trespassing,—this is the first-class deck."

Fresh horror came into their eyes; they had just escaped one danger to be plunged into another.

"We didn't know," they said, "no one told us not to come."

"You ought to have known," the boy said, "the



"You're trespassing,—this is the first-class deck."

captain won't take that excuse, I can assure you—you'll be sentenced like the rest of them."

"What'll they do to us?" Phyl said, with a hunted glance around.

The boy shrugged his shoulders and gave a low whistle.

"You saw some men sitting across one of the yard-

arms this morning," he said; "that's the usual punishment for trespassing on the first-class deck without leave. P'raps though as you're only girls they won't make you go so far as the mast,—see that rather low spar-yard up there; I believe that's the one kept for children."

Dolly was trembling so violently, Phyl put her own shaking arm round her waist to sustain her; but the boy was looking in front of him and did not notice the exceeding fright. Phyl touched his arm. "No one has seen us—perhaps we could slip down the steps before the captain gets here."

"Not a bit of it," said the cruel boy; "I can't see the law broken in this way, I'm going to give you in charge to one of the officers there."

A moan of despair broke from Dolly's pale lips, the tears burst from out her eyes.

"We shall fall in the sea and be drowned," she said chokingly, "we can't climb a bit."

"Well, my crikey!" said the boy, and the next minute Dolly found his arm was round her shoulder, and he was patting her and talking very fast and eagerly. "There, don't cry, little kid; of course I was only having a lark with you," he said; "I never thought you'd swallow it. Of course no one will say a word to you—how were you to know the decks? Here, come along, and I'll show you the barometer and heaps of other things."

But Phyl and Dolly, though reassured, were anxious not to trespass a moment longer.

"We'd better get down on our own deck now," they said nervously, and Phyl added, "Are you first-class?"

"Oh! the captain's my pater," the lad said. "I have a bunk in his cabin, and have my meals anywhere; it's better fun third, but the grub's better first."

"We'd really rather go," said Phyl, edging towards the companion at the sight of an officer approaching. "Mam—mother will be looking for us."

"Is she a little lady in black?" said the boy. "I saw her looking all over the decks below and asking the bo'sun questions. I thought she'd lost her box."

But Phyl and Dolly had sprung away from him, and were rapidly descending the steps backwards.

CHAPTER XII

AUSTRALIA

"Yesterday now is a part of forever
With glad days and sad days and bad days that never
Shall visit us more with their bloom and their blight,
Their fulness of sunshine or sorrowful night."

THE disappointment of Phyl and Dolly in Australia was very bitter.

They were actually in Sydney now, dwelling in furnished rooms, while their mother looked about her and tried to put her plans into execution. It was mere chance that made her choose Sydney rather than any of the other cities; it lay at the end of the vessel's journey for one thing, and thus added an extra four or five days to the exquisite voyage; for another she was a beauty lover, and had heard of the harbour's glories all her life; since all places now seemed equally without advantage, financially, to her, she thought she might at least bring her children up where Nature had been most royal.

But Phyl and Dolly were so saddened at the sight of the place, when, once through the frowning Heads,

they bore slowly down the far-famed waters to the Quay, that they could never afterwards say honestly that their first impressions of the harbour had filled them with rapturous admiration.

All the voyage they had whispered, whispered together, hanging dreamily over the vessel's side in the tropics; cuddled up wrapped in a rug when the freezing wind made the sailors say an iceberg must be at hand; shut in the cabin when the storms drove the other passengers to the saloon and privacy was impossible. Whispered, whispered, whispered, till a fairy Australia was firmly builded in their heads.

And there was no one to tone down the colouring of their skies for them, or to laughingly crop feet off their towering mountains, and set their notions of gold fields and kindred things aright, for no one knew of the strange building.

Those years of laughing ridicule, when the two were suddenly set down in a large family, had flung them back entirely upon themselves, and filled them with a shyness and reserve that lasted all their lives. Of all the evils the sun looked down upon, the worst seemed to them being laughed at; they would have endured tortures rather than have allowed those big boys and girls to know anything of their ways; they had a vague, shamed feeling that they *were* rather ridiculous atoms, but how to alter themselves they did not know. Life would have been insupportable if they never "pretended," and played nothing more

uneventful than "Chasings" and "Hide-and-seek" and "Hunt the Slipper." So they shrank together—even, in these matters, from their mother, who had been so busy that last year or two she could not follow them up to their absurd heights. In all the other joys and griefs of their lives they went direct to her; but in the whispering and pretending there was Phyl for Dolly and Dolly for Phyl, and the doors locked firmly on the world.

There was no one therefore to correct the perspective when they drew their plans of Australia.

When they steamed round Bradley's Head, and Sydney spread itself before their roughly-awakened senses, they both grew from that moment just a little older and sadder, and more like children who see life only as it is.

No chocolate-coloured beings, clad in bright, scanty garments, darted down to a yellow beach and pushed off in strange boats to welcome their ship; no kangaroos leapt back into the thick forests near the water's edge startled at their approach; no birds of brilliant plumage filled the air with colour and music. On the hill-slopes around there fed no million sheep, there waved no palms, there sprang no dazzling flowers. Nowhere lay a field dug into holes, the greenness of its grass showing up brilliantly the careless heaps of sparkling nuggets.

Merely a city stretched athwart the sky. Ordinary men and women, just such as had been left behind in

London, walked and stood and bustled about the Quay. Every-day warehouses, dull and dingy, crowded to left and right; above them, where the hills rose, thousands upon thousands of shops and houses—alas! for the cherished wigwams—were massed together, with church-spires and town-hall towers breaking up their regular level just as they did in London and other English towns. Afterwards, when the first keen edge of the disappointment had worn off, they tried to excuse the harbour city for its manifold shortcomings.

"Of course," Phyl said, "since there are such a dreadful lot of people here already they must have houses to live in; we ought to have thought of that, Dolly."

"And as such lots of ships come in, I s'pose they can't help having wharves and things," Dolly said.

The presence of the Quay, with its bustling reminiscences of the London docks in place of the yellow and white beaches thick with shells, she was finding hardest of all to forgive.

"And I s'pose they had to have trams and trains," sighed Phyl.

"But wouldn't you think there'd be just one or two aboriginals left?" said Dolly with saddened eyes.

Disallusion was Mrs. Conway's portion also.

She also had had her secret imaginings. She had been certain that everywhere there were places where a school had merely to be started to prove at once a

success. She felt sure that wealthy squatters were in continual need of governesses for their children, and only too willing and anxious to pay them a hundred or a hundred and fifty pounds a year for their services. She imagined her business training of the last two years would easily fit her for one of the secretaryships that are such rare and precious orchids in England, but as every new arrival knows—or at all events imagines—grow on every bush in Australia. The awakening was very rough and sharp.

A month slipped past; another one trod on its heels and tripped away mockingly. The tiny account in the bank grew less and less, for small girls must have enough to eat and a comfortable shelter for their heads. No one took the faintest notice of the repeatedly advertised statement that a well-educated lady offered her services as governess, or amanuensis; unless, indeed, it was some one who smiled a little at the faith and ignorance displayed by the well-educated lady in daring to value her services at £120 a year.

Yet on less than that sum Mrs. Conway knew it would be impossible to live. Indeed she could plainly see that, even if she succeeded in obtaining such a salary, she would have to make repeated incursions into that poor two hundred pounds, which was her one plank between the waters of the whirlpool where so many struggled for a little time and sank.

The prospect grew gloomier and gloomier; the

little wrinkle of worry that the voyage had smoothed away came back on the mother's brow; Phyl and Dolly read the Situations Vacant column in the newspaper every morning over her shoulder, and with eyes as preternaturally grave as hers. Even Weenie had a knowledge that the position was a serious one.

There came a temporary help from a shy, silent man who was boarding in the same house. He belonged to a firm of big drapers in the city and had taken an unobtrusive interest in the efforts of the young widow to obtain employment.

"Of course you wouldn't go into a shop," he said to her one morning with nervous abruptness.

"If you mean my pride wouldn't let me, you are wrong," said Mrs. Conway; "I have entirely pocketed that. But it needs experience and reference from former employers—no one would have me."

He told her of a temporary vacancy that had occurred in his own establishment; the lady who was head of one of the departments had fallen ill, and had been sent away for three months. If Mrs. Conway liked to come with him at once he would introduce her to the firm and could indeed promise her the work; he himself would undertake to teach her speedily the details of her position; what they chiefly wanted was a well-dressed, tactful person to be present in the show-room always to govern the young women who served, and in general to look

after the interests both of the firm and customers. The present head was drawing a salary of five pounds a week, but he was afraid the firm would not give more than three pounds to any one lacking experience—would Mrs. Conway consider that sufficient?

Mrs. Conway replied by hastening away with a tight feeling in her throat to put on her bonnet and gloves. She told him as they went along the street how she had been offered twenty-six pounds a year the day before at a registry office as governess for six children, and that that was the only genuine offer she had had.

"But this is not all roses," said the quiet man, "it is spirit-breaking work at times." He had at one time cherished hopes of entering one of the liberal professions himself.

"I have three little girls," said the widow, hastening along.

She held the post until the permanent head of the department was restored to health; the children went daily to a cheap school near, and they lived quietly and economically in furnished rooms for the three months. Phyl and Dolly were grown up before they learned just what spirit-breaking work it had been; the little mother was always so bright and full of gaiety for them they had no idea at the time that it was even unpleasant.

Then just when the old wearying search for work was starting again, the silent man found a similar

position, though at a smaller salary, in a far-away country town.

Away they went with the boxes and bags that held everything they could call their own in all this new strange continent.

They unpacked their possessions and prepared to settle down to life under this fresh aspect. But in two months came a startling blow—the country firm went bankrupt. Not one penny of her salary for those eight weeks could the widow obtain, and in addition she was forced to sustain all the travelling expenses which, it had been promised, would be reimbursed to her.

"Write to Mr. Blair, mama," said Phyl hopefully at this crisis; "he'll soon find you something to do."

But even this help was now cut off; the silent man had written a letter to the widow since she had been in this inland town and begged her to return and marry him; he found it impossible to fill the blank her absence caused.

Mrs. Conway sighed deeply as she wrote her gentle but decided refusal; this good plain man's advice had been of such service to her, and now she could no longer ask it.

Then while still in the little town and looking almost hopelessly towards the return to Sydney, the local house-agent, with whom she had had some transactions, approached her.

He had a cottage to let in a small township not

more than fifty miles away; there was an excellent opening, he said, for a good private school there; indeed, excepting a half-time public school there was no other for miles around.

Mrs. Conway eagerly adopted the suggestion; teaching seemed delightful work after these five months of "spirit-breaking," and hitherto she had been afraid to attempt a school because, in every instance she had inquired about, a heavy sum had been necessary for the purchase. But here was, as the agent said, a town with a population of five thousand souls and not a single private school; and here was to let a comfortable cottage with two acres of garden and five rooms for the ridiculous rent of fifteen shillings a week.

Mrs. Conway signed the lease for a year—the agent professed himself unable to let for a shorter period—and she spent some of her hoarded "safety money" in the purchase of the necessary piano and furniture.

"I really think the sun is going to shine on us at last, little girls," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

MOONDI-MOONDI

"With fire and fierce drought on her tresses
Insatiable summer oppresses
Sere woodland and sad wildernesses,
And faint flocks and herds."

MOONDI-MOONDI, Sunnymeade yclept, lay parched and panting beneath the sun of another summer. Dr. Wise's cottage showed little change; perhaps the walls were dirtier, certainly there were more pencillings, and the amateur scribblings of small fingers upon the verandah posts and fences. You still fell over small boys in whatever part of the house you essayed to walk, and *Human Buds, and our Responsibilities in the Grafting of Them*, still stood in its now well-worn cover in a place on the bookshelves convenient for reference.

Mrs. Wise had gone out for the day—a very rare occurrence. She had driven off in the old buggy with the doctor and her youngest baby to a station twenty miles away, to see some one who was staying there, and had been at school with her.

She had left Clif with strict injunctions to take good care of Alf and Richie, for it was Lizzie's washing-day, and who else was there to put to the task?

But quite early in the morning Teddie came rushing back to the house with round eyes and a most red, excited face.

Clif was lying, face downwards, on the floor in the dining-room, with Scott's *Pirate* for companion, and, as might be imagined, his charges were following, unchecked, their own sweet wills. This morning this happened to be scratching "capital A's," which they had just learned to make, on the seats and backs of the chairs.

"Oh, guess," cried Teddie, bursting in, "*guess* what, Clif!"

"What?" said Clif, but the Pirate's doings were too engrossing for him to lift his eyes.

"'Brownses' is taken," said Teddie, "and it's a school that's coming."

Clif dropped his book and drew a great breath. School was what he had ardently desired for almost two years. It had seemed so babyish, so unmanly, to be kept hanging about home each and every day, doing a few simple tasks amid all manner of interruptions, for his father and mother to correct, pushing the perambulator up and down the paths or the road, forced to play most of his time in the dull patch of ground, called by courtesy the garden, so that he

might keep a watch on those restless spirits, Richie and Alf.

He got up, quite trembling with excitement.

"Let's go and look," he said, and the next minute was scrambling over the fence that separated the two orchards.

No wonder Teddie had been excited at the change that had taken place at "Brownses" since the day before. All the windows were flung open, the almost obliterated "To Let" notice had gone, and a woman, who lived near, was scrubbing away at the dirty floors.

The lads fairly fell upon her with their questions: "When was the school coming? Which was going to be the school-room? Had the teacher got maps and a black-board? Did she teach out of *Little Arthur's History*, or *The Royal*, and would they have arithmetic every day?"

The woman ran them out of the house at last with her broom and locked herself in, and they were forced to walk around outside and make conjectures about the things they could not find out.

At mid-day dinner, Lizzie was very irate over their neglect of their two little brothers.

"That Richie went under the house after the cat," he said, "and it had a snake in its mouth."

This was so every-day an occurrence, that Clif was not in the least conscience-stricken.

"Old Blackeye wouldn't have let him touch it," he

said; "she always takes jolly good care no one gets a show to take it from her."

"Well, Alf lighted a newspaper," the girl continued, "he might have set hisself afire. You'll just stop here this afternoon, Master Clif, and look after them, or I'll tell the Missus."

Clif cudgelled his brain to think of something that

The woman ran them out of the house with her broom.

would keep them safely amused while he and Ted explored further. Whatever happened he felt he must be on the scene every day now when the train came in, for the woman had said that the new people might come any day. Ted was equally convinced that he must, so there could be no relegating duty. At last he hit on a plan, and told Lizzie he was going to take

the small ones out with him, which quite satisfied the girl. He told Teddie his idea, and between them they purloined one of the clothes-lines, some gingerbread, a bottle of jam, and a newspaper or two.

Then they set off with their troublesome charges. A quarter of an hour's walk away, at the head of the swamp creek, there were a number of pools of water, very shallow at this dry time of the year. Clif selected an isolated one that was far enough from the bush to be tolerably safe from snakes, and yet close enough to be hidden from the road. He helped the little lads to undress, and he put their clothes in safety on the bough of a tree—part of his responsibility was to keep them from ruining their clothes. Round each of their naked little waists he tied a length of rope which he made fast to the tree. He told them they were wild Indians, imprisoned for scalping whites, but that he had begged the king to give them enough freedom to bathe when they liked, as wild Indians went mad if they didn't. He put the gingerbread, the bottle of jam, and a spoon close to them, and he rapidly made a fleet of paper boats for them to sail.

The little lads were capering with delight at the novel game, and hardly noticed when the big boys slipped away.

"That's great," said Clif as they went back; "they can't get into a bit of harm, 'cause they can't go past the length of the rope anywhere. And they can't hurt their blessed clothes; and they can't get drowned

'cause the water's not up to their knees; and they can't catch cold, it's so hot. Come on, the train must be nearly in."

"Tell you," said Ted, "let's hide in their garden and watch them; they'd only stop at the station a minute or two, and they'd see us if we followed." Their mother had impressed it upon them very clearly the last time the tenants moved into this house, that people hated little boys to stand about and stare when they were moving, and that nice gentlemanly boys would not think of even peeping through the cracks of the fence.

Clif found his brother's suggestion good.

"Near the side-room window there's a tank, we could squeeze down in the place where it doesn't touch the wall and see everything," he said.

"Come on," said Ted, "I can hear the train." And they swarmed over the fence with no further ado.

For nearly an hour they crouched patiently in their uncomfortable position before there was anything to see. Ted was just suggesting this could not be the day, but at last there came rumbling along the old patched-up cart of the blacksmith, the only one obtainable at short notice. An idler, not more than half sober, walked beside it—the only man obtainable at short notice. No one in the place had known the new teacher was coming so soon, or there would have been quite an army to offer help, for the people were kindly. But it happened that the Sunday-school picnic was

taking place a mile or two away, and the village was deserted. Behind the cart walked a little lady in black, with two little light-haired girls beside her, and a little dark-haired one running in front.

They turned in at the gate. The boys wondered what made the lady look as if she were going to cry as she gazed at the forlorn empty cottage. The scrubbing woman had gone—indeed, so anxious to get to the picnic had she been, she had not finished the work, meaning to come back to it at night; the windows, though thrown up, had still a year's dirt upon them; there was a bucket of dirty water in the narrow hall; in the kitchen there was a heap of old fish- and jam-tins and other rubbish.

The man was unloading the cart under protest; the boys watched him bump in some packing-cases and flat cabin-boxes, a few chairs, two mattresses, and a bundle of bed-laths. The little girls kept running to and fro with the lighter bags and articles.

"Where is the rest of the beds?" said the lady, looking in dismay at the now almost empty cart.

"Must ha' left it at the station," said the man laconically. He tipped the cart at an angle and slid the piano-case off on to the footpath.

"Have to get two men to lift that in," he said, "can't shift a piano by myself; ten bob, please, mum."

The lady seemed afraid of him, and hurriedly gave him his half-sovereign to get rid of him. He climbed

into his cart and went bumping off down the road again.

The forlorn little procession trailed slowly into the cottage and to the very room beneath the window of which the boys were crouching. The mother sat down on a packing-case, struggled to smile and say something cheerful, but found it impossible and burst into tears instead, and the three tired, dispirited little girls joined in heartily.

"Whatever's up with them?" said Teddie, uneasily.

"They're in black," whispered Clif, "some one's dead."

"Come, Phyl, come, Dolly, this will never do," said the mother, drying her eyes after a little time, "we must make the best of it, little daughters, and first of all we must get something to eat or we shall all be ill."

The little girls mopped their eyes and looked round mournfully.

"What can we get?" Phyl said.

"There are some of the sandwiches left," said Dolly, but there was no enthusiasm in her tone.

"There's a little box of groceries at the top of this packing-case," Mrs. Conway said; "I put it there ready for an emergency, so we shall have tea and sugar and butter, but I certainly don't know what we shall do for milk and bread."

Weenie began to cry again dismally—hunger always reduced her to tears more speedily than anything else.

"I wants some ben an' milk," she said, lapsing into the phrase of her babyhood.

Clif stirred uneasily.

"I could get a loaf and some milk out of our kitchen in a minute," he whispered to Ted, "but p'raps they wouldn't take it if they thought we'd been peeping."

"Let's drop them through the window, and run away," Ted suggested.

"You stop there," Clif said, squeezing himself stealthily out of the hiding-place. He crept along close to the house lest one of the little girls should glance out the window and see him, and he climbed the fence and reached his own kitchen in safety. He took the jug of milk that had been set aside for tea and one of the two loaves of bread, and went back, carefully slipping the jug through a broken paling and dropping the loaf over in advance of himself.

Teddie reported that the lady was nearly crying again and the littlest girl had hardly stopped a minute. They had gone into the kitchen to see about a fire, and found it worse than any place in the house. And next, they had hunted all over the house for the water-tap, and at last the biggest little girl had gone outside and had noticed the tank. But, when they tried it, it was quite empty.

"They almost saw me, too," wound up Ted, "I couldn't help breathing once, and the middlest girl said, 'Oh, come away quickly, I'm sure there's a frog there.'"

"Are they in this room yet?" asked Clif.

The little boy nodded.

"The lady's trying to open one of the boxes, and she can't," he said.

Clif slipped along the ground to the front; the door was shut, but one of the windows was open, so very very softly he climbed through, set the jug and loaf on the floor, and retreated with heart beating rapidly.

The spice of excitement and daring was making the blood dance in his veins. He pictured them going into that room with pleasure and surprise: it would seem to them as if fairies had been there. He crept round the house, looking for fresh worlds to conquer for them.

"How are they getting on?" he whispered to Teddie, who was still peeping through the creeper round the window with absorbed eyes.

"She's found the kettle," reported Teddie, "it was in the little box, but she can't get the big one open; she's trying to light a fire now in the fire-place with the bits of wood the woman left and a newspaper; she says the kitchen's too dirty to go into."

Clif peeped in, and a few moments' watching sufficed to show him that the fire would never burn—he was an authority on fire-making. The lady was on her knees by the open fire-place; in the middle of it she had put two or three small blocks of wood, and on the top of this a newspaper crumpled up. Again and

again she put a match to it, again and again the paper caught, flared up, died down. Then she and two of the little girls puffed at it with their lips till the tears ran down their cheeks with the smoke and heat; the wood would crackle a moment, show red for a minute or two, then die out to sulky blackness.

"And even if it does burn," said Phyl, "what is the use of it without water?"

The lady rose from her knees at last.

"I must go and ask help from some one," she said; "there are two or three cottages not very far down the road, perhaps there may be some one there who would help a little." She added a little bitterly: "In England a new-comer would not have to go out in search for help, some neighbour would have been to offer it. You may come with me, Phyl, we may have to carry the water back."

On their way up the hall they saw the bread and milk, and their exceeding surprise and pleasure satisfied even Clif.

"We shall get some tea after all," they said, and hurried off with lighter hearts.

Dolly and Weenie, left behind, grew nervous in the strangely silent place, and Clif perceived the fact. "Gr-r-r-r-r!" he said at the window, and made a few more sounds calculated to terrify, an act that caused Teddie the greatest amazement, it seemed such wanton cruelty.

Dolly seized Weenie's hand.

"L-l-let's go and wait at the gate," she said, and they fled away together.

It was then that Clif established himself in the place as a good fairy; he thought it a great pity that people should be foolish enough to object to little boys looking on, for he could have helped much better if he had been admitted openly to the house. He sent Teddie off to their own pump with the kettle and bade him bring back the axe. He had a fire burning in a very few minutes, and the kettle sitting in a most comfortable and ordinary way upon it; with the axe and a hammer he broke the lids of two of the packing-cases, and was just starting on a third, when he heard the footsteps coming back along the path.

He had only just time to scramble out of the window again with Teddie's help, before the new people were actually in the house.

More weary and dispirited than ever sounded the voices; they had been able to make no one hear, it seemed, though they tried at four cottages; every place was quite shut up.

"There's a house at the back of this," said Phyl, who had been looking round; "I wonder would it be any use trying there,—why,—how,—*look* at the fire!"

They had reached the doorway by this time, and all sprang across the room to the wonderful sight.

"There's even water in the kettle," Phyl said, the first to break the silence of surprise.

Mrs. Conway looked round a little nervously.

"This is all very strange," she said; "there must be some one in the house; I—I can't understand it all."

Dolly grew a little pale.

"P'waps it's a haunted house," she whispered, "p'waps there are spiwits in it."

"Nonsense," said her mother; "at all events it's a very practical and kindly spirit." She went out and looked in every room; Dolly was able to testify no one had been in or out of the gate, for she and Weenie had stood there all the time.

"But there was a vewy dweadful noise once," she said, with a glance of fear over her shoulder.

Mrs. Conway raised her voice so that it would go through all the little cottage.

"Is any one there?" she said. "Is any one in the house? if so, will they please speak?"

"P'raps she won't mind us," whispered Teddie; "go on, say yes, they're getting frightened."

Some brown wavy hair and a thin boy's face, very red and ashamed of itself, showed at the open window.

"It's only me," he said, with extreme depreciation in his tone, "and my brother Teddie."

Mrs. Conway held out a welcoming hand.

"Come in," she said, "you have been very kind, little boys. Can you get down there all right? This is Teddie, is it? And what is your name? Clif? Clif Wise? What made you take such a funny way of doing good to us?"

"'Come in,' she said, 'you have been very kind little boys.'"

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Clif grew redder than ever. He had climbed down at her request, and Teddie had followed him, but he was very anxious now to depart by way of the door.

"We'll have to go now," he said at last, after a minute or two's silence, during which Phyl and Dolly had studied him critically. "Come on, Ted."

But Mrs. Conway threw herself upon his protection in such a way that he felt a most pleasurable thrill of manliness.

"If you would stay and help me for a little time I should be very glad," she said; "you see everything is so new and strange to us, we don't know where to turn for anything. For instance, where can we get water from?—everything here seems empty."

"You can get it at Johnson's, the baker's," Clif said, "or over at Green's, the cottage with the painted roof, down the road. If you give me threepence I'll go and buy you a bucketful."

"Threepence!" cried Mrs. Conway; "you don't mean to tell me water costs anything?"

Clif soothed her shyly.

"Not often," he said; "in the winter you never have to buy it, and sometimes in the summer there is enough, but whenever there is a drought like this, everybody buys their drinking water from the people who have big wells and tanks, and get what they want for washing or baths from the pools at the head of the Swamp."

The poor little lady looked quite stunned under this fresh blow. Surely this was a very dreadful wilderness she had lighted upon.

"I—I think we had better have tea at once," she said faintly. Phyl had unpacked some cups and saucers, Dolly had found the butter, Weenie was eating ravenously at the packet of sugar.

Phyl darted an ungrateful glance at their small benefactors; she considered they need not have worried her mother about things like this the first evening, and she thought it quite time they retired, since there seemed nothing more they could do now but stand and stare.

While her mother stooped down to make the tea she slipped up to them.

"Is it easier for you to go by the front door or the back?" she said, not loud enough however to be heard by her mother.

"The back," said Cliff, slow however to see they were dismissed, so interested was he in watching proceedings.

"*Good*-bye," said the little girl with an insinuating smile; she could hardly have done it better if she had been a society woman.

Cliff stared at her a moment—he had purposed staying here and helping for hours.

But then he got very red and backed suddenly out of the doorway, pulling Teddie after him.

"Where are the little boys?" said the mother when

she turned round; "how strange of them to go so suddenly!"

"It will be much nicer to have tea without them," Phyl said, establishing herself calmly on a hat-box; "I never saw anything like the way they stared."

"They were very nice little boys indeed," said her mother warmly.

At that moment the very nice little boys were standing arraigned before their justly irate parents, who, driving home late in the day, had heard such pitiful crying not far from the roadway, they had gone in search of it, and had found the poor little forgotten Red Indians. Red Indians in very truth, for they were smeared from head to heel with the crimson jam.

"It might have killed the poor little things," said their mother in great agitation.

"But it hasn't," said Clif consolingly; "they'll be as right as ever in the morning."

And truly enough they were.

CHAPTER XIV

TRYING TO LIVE

IT almost came to pass that in a month "Brownses" was empty again. After a long talk with Dr. Wise and the clergyman Mrs. Conway was aghast at the prospect before her. There were absolutely no possibilities about the place. The miners' children went to the half-time public school, which also the tradesmen's young ones attended. Dr. Wise promised Cliff and Teddie, the clergyman his two grandchildren, but six guineas a quarter would hardly keep a house going.

"There is no help for it, I must go back to Sydney," the widow said, but a white look came over her face. She was in the Wises' cottage, and the doctor and his wife were discussing the situation with her.

"That scamp of an agent!" cried the doctor hotly. "You are saddled with your house for a year, are you not?"

Mrs. Conway's lips said yes, her voice she knew would fail her.

The doctor strode up and down the room, his blood boiling. It seemed a blot on his country that a defenceless widow should hardly have landed on its shores before she fell a prey to a scoundrel like that.

"I'd bring it before the Courts, if I could," he said from time to time.

"Oh, he was careful to do nothing punishable," said Mrs. Conway with a little bitter smile. "I believe the population is just as he stated, and there is certainly no other school. And there really are two acres of land, and some of the fruit-trees have no disease, so I suppose he thought he had sufficient grounds for saying 'two acres of orchard in full bearing.'"

"The scamp," cried the doctor again.

"Cruel, cruel," said Mrs. Wise. She leaned back in her rocking-chair, tears suffusing her faded eyes. She was imagining herself pitted against the world, like this slight, black-clad woman, and the petty trials of her everyday life sank away into insignificance. Her glance sprang to her big, wide-backed husband striding angrily about the room. The loud tramp of his feet, the very tobacco odour that clung to him sent a sudden feeling of warmth, thankfulness, and security to her worried heart.

"Let us think what can be done, Alfred," she said; "surely between us some plan can be arranged."

The three little maids lunched by themselves in the cottage off bread-and-butter and apples, and Mrs.

Conway stayed shaping their lives most of the afternoon with this man and woman, who gave their help and advice as readily and thoroughly as if the stranger had been a kinswoman.

"Doing without things" Mrs. Conway agreed was to be made a fine art of. There was as much fruit as they could eat, the doctor said; they must grow vegetables (his own idle young scamps should do the digging); and fowls, it seemed, were to be got together as easily as mosquitoes.

"Fruit, eggs, vegetables—we should not starve," said Mrs. Conway thoughtfully.

"Firewood is to be had for the gathering," said the doctor; "good exercise for the little girls—one of them looks a bit in need of it, I notice."

"Six guineas, and a little from the bank each quarter, would pay the rent," continued the widow.

"But what about boots, and clothes, and bread, and groceries, and meat?" cried the doctor's wife—these were things that made such deep holes in her own housekeeping funds.

"Oh, we must learn to walk softly," said Mrs. Conway—she even laughed, for the road in front of her began to look less desperate. "Clothes we have enough of for some time, and even if not—well, one's elbows would not grow blue with cold in this land of yours, even if they did make holes through their covering. And meat, and groceries, and bread—well, I must manage them some way."

And the "some way" was not so very hard to find after all. When the little school was actually opened, there came stray pupils for odd lessons,—the mine-manager's grown-up girls for music; the children of two squatters riding in twice a week from over the hills and far away for drawing and music; the baker's daughter and the butcher's niece also to be taught the pianoforte.

Later on Mrs. Conway organized a cookery-class and a cutting-out class for a very small fee; taught the miners' untrained wives that mutton-chops and tea, and tinned goods need not necessarily be on the table six days out of seven; and that pinafores and frocks were better cut out with patterns and precision, than chopped out in any fashion.

When Mrs. Conway looked back on the time at Sunnymeade, she felt this last task had paid her better than any.

And the time slipped along.

Days grew into weeks, weeks widened into months, and months spread into years—two of them—and still the little school went on, and the widow and her small daughters just managed to live.

Mrs. Conway grew thin with the ceaseless work and anxiety; and two wrinkles that came out on her forehead, during that time of stress, made their home there for life.

The two breathless, terrible summers during which they stayed in Sunnymeade tried her strength exceed-

ingly, but strangely enough the children were not greatly affected by them. Dolly's red roses were not quite so bright perhaps, nor her arms so plump as English winters had found them, and Weenie's activity on the hottest days kept her somewhat thin, but Phyl improved wonderfully. The cough had flown, the old man of the sea seemed utterly cast away, and a healthy brown had come creeping over her little white cheeks.

The fare at the cottage ran perforce on strictly simple, inexpensive lines—porridge, fruit, eggs, and bread forming the staple diet, but that, though monotonous, hurt none of them.

And frocks were turned and twisted about, and tucks were let down, and boots went to the cobbler's for repairs till sole and upper refused to have longer lease of life forced upon them.

Yet the cottage was the daintiest of places, for the mother would not let the memory of an ugly home lie on their minds, when the little girls grew older.

The sitting-room had unlined weatherboard walls, varnished however to a warm brown seemliness. White matting was on the floor, white soft curtains blew about the ever open window, round which, in early summer, wisteria hung heavy with sweetness. There were only two chairs, but who minded that when there was a comfortable sofa, made soft and inviting with cushions of delicate flowered chintz, and chintz-covered box seats for the small ones? And

there were some of the old home pictures, and books and photographs and little prettinesses, and the dearly bought piano was there to while away long evening hours.

Mrs. Wise always sighed as she entered the pretty room.

"But imagine white matting with five great boys

Boots went to the cobbler's for repairs.

about!" she used to say. Nevertheless the first spring saw fresh muslin curtains brightening her own rooms, and the doctor's pleasure in them was so great, that she was stimulated to other touches of beauty about her home.

She even began to take thought for what she

should wear—a thing she had forgotten to do for years. Clif was the unconscious cause of this.

He was hanging over his mother's chair one evening on the verandah, talking happily to her for once about *Westward Ho!* which he had just finished; and for once she had not sought to improve the occasion by deducing a moral from the story, although she had a vague and uneasy consciousness, as the lad rattled on, that she ought to do so.

In the midst of the talk Mrs. Conway passed down the road, a fresh, girlish-looking figure in white with a black band at her waist, and a white chip hat, muslin-covered, against the sun. Phyl was hanging on her arm, Dolly and Weenie in lavender washing frocks were running races in front of her.

Clif's eyes followed them, then came back to his mother in her drab-coloured and unbeautiful clothes.

"Why don't *you* wear white dresses and things, mother?" he said discontentedly.

And the colour ran up into Mrs. Wise's cheeks. She had suddenly seen herself with her son's and husband's eyes.

"I—I think I must, Clif," she said tremulously.

And that very evening had seen her with some white lace drooped about her neck, and a pink rose in her brooch, and her hair loosened and quite prettily arranged about her forehead.

CHAPTER XV

'A LITTLE FOLDING OF THE HANDS TO SLEEP'

"Not so, not cold! but very poor instead!
Ask God who knows! for frequent tears have run
The colours from my life, and left so dead
And pale a stuff, it were not fitly done
To give the same as pillow to thy head,
Go farther! Let it serve to trample on."

MRS. WISE was dead.

The second year of the little school life at Sunnymeade she had fallen ill of typhoid fever, and though cured at length of that, she had seemed too listless and tired to struggle back to health.

She slipped away, away; there came a week when the little boys trod softly about the house, and looked at her with round awed eyes, and never answered a word back when she fretted at them as usual for their noise, their muddy boots, their quarrellings.

What was the strange thing their father had told them that morning? Their mother dying, dying fast. And yet how strange!—she still lay on the old sofa in the dining-room, and only that very morning

had sewn up the buttonhole of little Alf's braces, and stitched the torn brim of Teddie's hat.

Dying! Why, she had spoken irritably to their father an hour ago, and had smacked baby's hands because he would squeeze the thin kitten and drag it across the room by the tail. Surely dying people spoke softly and wept, and said gentle things and prayed—prayed all the time!

The boys were inclined to disbelieve their father, who had told them the fact thus beforehand, that she, poor soul, might in her last days have gentleness and tenderness around her all the time.

"Doesn't she know, Daddie?" little Alf whispered in the afternoon that followed the morning on which they had first learnt the news.

He had been sitting on a stool not far from the sofa, gazing at his mother with solemn, half-frightened eyes, while she sewed on a commonplace and necessary button. She had scolded him for getting it off again so soon—surely, surely it was impossible that she could think of such things if she were as ill as his father had said?

When Dr. Wise entered the room, the child could not forbear to put the question, though he had been warned carefully to say nothing before his mother.

He crept to his father, still with that earnest, half-fearful expression in his eyes.

"Doesn't she know, Daddie?" he whispered, and

thought he had made his voice very small and soft. But lusty little Alf's whisper!

His father frowned him from the room, and he moved to go in instant, frightened haste, holding his knickerbockers up as he went.

"He can't go without his braces," said the voice from the sofa; "come here, Alf."

The child moved back to her and stood nervously still while she fastened the little straps in place.

"There," she said, "now go and play, and don't get your clean coat dirtied, and don't let me hear you quarrelling with Richie, and be a kind little brother too, and let Freddie get in your cart if he wants to."

"Yes, mother dear," said Alf, and gave her one more strange little look and passed out of the room.

"Did you drink your port, Ellie?" the doctor said, glancing at the lunch-tray near her. His eyes were looking at her very tenderly.

Did she—*did* she know, or must he tell her in so many words?

"No, I didn't," she said; "it is foolish of you to get it—you know you can't afford seven-and-six a bottle."

"I think I can, dear," he said gently.

"Oh!" she said, and the fret in her voice jarred him strangely, "just look at those grease-spots on your waistcoat. Didn't Sarah set your table-napkin? The careless, heedless creature! Yet how you can

let food drop like that I don't know. It is a pretty example for the children. And you never think of me, always cleaning and sponging your clothes for you."

The doctor looked with troubled eyes at the drop or two of tea his waistcoat still bore from his hurriedly swallowed lunch. Then he drew out his handkerchief and rubbed the marks anxiously away.

"See, they don't show, dear," he said gently.

"Let me see," she said.

He came closer for inspection, his eyes still looking down ruefully at his coat.

"Robert! Robert!" she cried, and the suddenly changed voice seemed to come from a depth of anguish he had never dreamt it was in her nature to sound. He looked at her, startled, saw her working face and the agony in her eyes, and was down on his knees beside her, holding her, helping her, great tears bursting from his eyes.

"Oh!" she said, when her voice came to her again, after a speechless indrawing of breath, "do you think I don't know? Do you really think I don't know? Do you think I didn't hear poor little Alf and see his big eyes? Do you think I haven't known for weeks—weeks?"

"Hush!" he said, his tears raining hotter, "hush, Ellie—Ellie, dear one."

She gave a dreadful little laugh.

"Oh! I don't mind," she said, "I don't mind in

the least. You will all be glad, I know. Oh, of course you will be decently sorry first—black bands on your arms and all that, even if the money won't run to black suits. But even baby will laugh and crow more when there is no one worrying, worrying all day long."

"Ellie," he said, "Ellie—for God's sake."

"I like to see you crying," she said, "one wouldn't like to think no one spared any tears. But I can see you so well in a month from now, smoking peacefully on this sofa with no nagging voice going on and on."

"Ellie," he said, "isn't it hard enough for me? Are you trying to torture me past endurance?"

Her lips trembled; she tried to be hard again, but failed. Then she gave a piteous sob.

"I can't help it, Rob," she said, and clung to him. "Ever since I've known, I've been trying to be different, to act as one should with death to face. But oh! if you *knew* what it is to feel you have bungled your life, so that no one will care when you're gone! Every time I have been irritable lately I have wondered at myself, but"—her voice choked—"if I hadn't had that relief I couldn't have borne it."

"My wife, my poor little wife," he said; he stroked her hair, he held her nervous hand. "God knows you have done your best; the odds have been heavy against us both, that is all. Oh! if I had been more tender to you, poor little girl!"

Her lips quivered again.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, Robert," she said, "everything was my fault. Do you think I don't remember now how often you wanted to be loving—wanted to pet me? And I was always too busy, always making a Martha of myself, always toiling after the little boys."

He sighed a little—an irrepressible sigh; a vision of their spoilt lives stood mutely before him.

"But—no," he said, "no, no—the fault has been mine; surely I could have worked harder and made life easier for you."

She shook her head and leaned against him in silence for a little space.

She spoke calmly, quietly.

"When I am dead, I should like you to marry Mrs. Conway," she said.

"Oh, hush, hush, hush!" he cried; "Ellie, I *cannot* stand much more."

"I am not trying to hurt you now," she said. "Don't think I am just saying this as a martyr might. I could go quite peacefully if I felt my poor old Rob was going to taste happiness, after all these wretched years. I feel as if I had been like the dresses I wear that Clif hates—a nondescript, colourless thing. And Life itself is such a dull, grey affair at best, I ought to have tried to be a bright colour."

Through the window came the voices of the little boys, all their soberness dispersed by the sun's merry magic.

"I'm off to get locusts," shouted Richie. The clatter of his strong little boots sounded along the wooden verandah.

Lighter footfalls followed—"Me, me too, Richie," cried Alfie's voice.

And toddling steps came along eagerly, stumblingly. "Me dit gwirlies, me dit gwirlies, Wichie."

"Oh, my boys, my boys!" the mother sobbed, "and they will only remember me carping, fretful, scolding. But no one will keep Alfie from telling stories now, and Richie from being greedy, and Clif from selfishness."

"I will do my best, Ellie," said the poor doctor.

"But you are away," she said despairingly, "how can you watch them? You *must* give them another mother."

But again he implored her not to make it too hard for him, and she grew silent, and leaning her head against him stared with wistful eyes about the shabby, comfortless room, that soon would know her no more. And yet there was a strange pleasure in the thought of shutting her eyes for ever on it. Since the time Clif was a fractious, delicate baby (he was fourteen now), it seemed to her she had never known what it was to have an unbroken night. Oh! the peace of death, the exquisite restfulness!—she felt too tired to lift her eyes just yet to green pastures or streets of sardonyx and pearls,—all she wanted was to be left alone to sleep, sleep, sleep.

Away in her own cottage, some days later, Mrs. Conway's eyes were wet over a parcel of books Clif had just brought her.

The lad's eyes were red, his mouth twitched at every word; it was only yesterday he and his father and Teddie and Alf had stood by that yawning grave, and watched their mother put away out of sight and sound for all time.

"Father says she asked him to give you these," he said, thrusting out his parcel; Mrs. Conway's eyes filled at his desolate looks; she put her arm round his shoulder as he stood there.

"Poor old fellow, poor old fellow," she said.

"If you *knew* what a beast I've been to her," he burst out. Then his tears choked him, and he pushed her comforting arm aside, and went to break his heart in his old hiding-place. There was a note with the books.

"You are the only woman friend I have," it said, "so there is no one else I can ask this of. Help my little boys all you can, and in any way you can brighten my husband's life.

"I send you these books, they may help you—to me they seemed cruelly hard to follow. And I send you my own notes of the boys' characters. I know quite well this is not a small thing I am asking, but what can I do? Five little boys, the bitter world, and no woman. Forgive me, and help me thus, when I am past all other helping."

Oh, the books! *Human Buds*, of course, and all its marvellous maxims and rules; *Souls and Minds of Children;* and *Our Responsibilities to the Young.*

But the red note-book was the most pitiful. Such laboured notes, such anxious writing down of smallest detail of each lad's behaviour.

Even Richie's four-year-old sinfulness was soberly expatiated upon. "Did his present greediness indicate a tendency to avarice in the future?" asked the sad pen. "Must watch carefully and pass nothing by," it added. "Memo: deprive him of sweet things for a day—most efficacious punishment."

And Alfie,—Alfie who at one time showed a tendency to stray from truth's narrow path when such rending questions as "Who stole the cake?" or "Who broke the window?" were sternly put. "Alfie," said the notes, "must be appealed to through his better nature, must be told stories of noble men and boys; Washington's glorious tale among others."

There was even a page headed "Little Baby." Baby was passionate, it seemed, more so than any of the others; he hit the table angrily if he bumped his head, he screamed himself into fits if sugar was not forthcoming.

"If not checked, might not such anger lead him," said the frightened notes, "some day to some dreadful crime?"

After this, the last note in the book, there were

blots that tears might have caused, or a pen let fall despairingly.

Phyl and Dolly coming in to ask had not Richie and Alf better be kept for tea, found their mother sobbing over the pitiful strivings and gropings of that poor dead woman.

CHAPTER XVI

THE END OF PLAY DAYS

WITH the constant derision that so much boy companionship brought at Sunnymeade, Jennie and Suey had been forced to retire from adventurous lives, and now, wrapped in soft old handkerchiefs, they passed their later days in a quiet box that stood on a cupboard shelf.

Suey had lost an arm; that was on one occasion in Sunnymeade, when a bushranging game had been popular, and Clif, admitted half-jealously to it, had seized her so roughly from the burning roof of the station he had stuck up, that all Phyl's heartbroken care could effect no remedy.

And Jennie's thin hair was drawn back and combed carefully to conceal the sad fact that the back half of her head was false. This was also due to Clif. Enmity used sometimes to reign between the boys and girls in the two cottages, and on these occasions Dolly used to take a wicked pleasure in running

through the careful rings of marbles Clif and Teddie would make.

Retaliation had once carried Jennie high up a gum-tree near. "The lovely hewoine twying to escape from the hangman on the Tower of London," Clif had called teasingly from his height, and he had thereupon lowered the waxen creature by a piece of string.

Underneath the tree, Dolly jumped about in anguish. "Oh, Clif, please, Clif—*dear* Clif, do give her to me. I'll never jump on your marbles again, twuly I won't," she cried beseechingly.

Jennie dangled within a foot of her head,—she sprang up again and again to grasp her, but each time just as her hands almost closed on her treasure, the string was jerked, and the "escaping hewoine" swung yards away.

There was one jerk too many of course, and poor Jennie lay at the foot of the tree, her head broken in two places. The "hangman" dropped to the ground, real distress on his face, so anguished was the cry of the mother as she dropped down beside her darling.

Mrs. Conway patched up the poor head, and time dried Dolly's tears, but so keen was Clif's repentance, and so many his hearty endeavours to make up, that the incident cemented a friendship between the little couple that lasted always.

But now such days and deeds had gone for ever. The dolls, worn out by their troublous life, lay at rest,

and the little mother's empty hands, groping for something to fill them, fastened after a time as a matter of course on pens.

There was an interval, however, before that relief came, in which the passion for "pretending" vented itself in an odd way. Mrs. Conway once, in turning over the frocks of her elder daughters, found in the pockets of both a number of small bits of wood. They were of different sizes, none more than a couple of inches high, and perhaps half an inch wide. Each one was wrapped in some scrap or other of material, one perhaps in white muslin with a scrap of blue silk tying it round the middle, one in a morsel of red cashmere, one in blue serge, and so on. She turned them over curiously in her hand.

"What on earth are these things?" she said. But Phyl and Dolly turned a deep uncomfortable red, and remained speechless.

Almost a year later, however, the mother came upon the pair sitting in the corner of the garden, the identical pieces of wood on their knees or strewn around them. Her footfall had been so light neither of the children heard her.

Both were murmuring, murmuring at the same time, neither exactly listening to the other, and yet there was such close connection between the games of the two that it is doubtful if either could have been played apart.

"Annabella is dwessing for the ball," Dolly was

murmuring. "Purple satin, and a bouquet of dahlias and poppies." "Oh, there you are, Muriel, I see you are dwessed—what a poor ugly dwess, but I suppose you can't afford a better, as you're only a governess." "Muriel is attired in pure white clinging muslin, with one moss-wose in her hair." And so on, and so on. Phyl's fair little face was ashine with the excitement of her game. "So he plunged madly in the river," she was murmuring, her hand at the same time making a dive with a scrap of wood attired in blue serge, "and Geraldine was floating along, her hair streaming on the water; she had sunk six times, and only had strength to put her arm round his neck before she fainted.

"He swam to the shore with his lovely burden, and there stood Luke Robespierre, and he had cut a leak in her boat. Sir Guy Redcliffe strode up to him, he put Lady Geraldine in a safe place first. 'You traitor, and villain,' he cried, and rushed upon him" (two bits of wood were banged forcibly together). "Luke drew a dagger from his sleeve, but Sir Guy brushed it aside, pulled his pistol from his pocket, and shot him through the heart."

"But," said the mother, stepping between them, her sense of humour overcoming everything else, "don't you think, Phyl, the powder would be wet after that long swim?"

Phyl's face went scarlet. Dolly, at the first footstep—for might it not be one of those dreadful boys?

—swept her wooden family into a hasty heap and thrust them into her pocket.

But the mother when her smile had died looked a little troubled. They seemed such big girls—Phyl was nearly thirteen—to be playing in so childish a manner; and the absurd stuff they were talking, where they had read or picked up such nonsense she could not tell,—who knew where such foolishness would end?

"My dears," she said, "I really think you are too old to play like this now. I do not often cross your wishes, do I?—but I must ask you both to throw those things quite away."

She talked to them a little longer, and they both felt ashamed of their silliness.

"We won't play with them again," they said sadly.

"Give them to me, and I will throw them away," the mother said.

But the two shrank from that—those bits of wood had dwelt in their pockets, shared their thoughts, their life, for over a year.

"Oh, please," they said, "please let us do it ourselves, mama."

An hour later they were disposing of them with unhappy eyes. They had buried all but two in a matchbox with cotton-wool, the grave being at the foot of a favourite tree. But Muriel and Sir Guy Redcliffe had still to be disposed of.

"Let's leave them exposed to the world," said Phyl; "if we bury them, they're dead; they may as well have some more adventures."

Away down the road was a railway-bridge with ironwork pillars at either end, rather elaborately wrought. Sir Guy was placed in one deep niche, and Muriel, attired in clinging white muslin, in another.

They buried them in a matchbox with cotton-wool.

For very long after this, whenever their walks took them past the bridge, Phyl and Dolly always walked that particular side of the road and peeped into the niches.

Their promise, they considered, bound their hands from taking the wooden couple out, but it was great

happiness to find them still there. And to this very day Muriel and Sir Guy may be still adventuring in those iron recesses and exposing themselves to the world's hardships; for many years after Dolly found Muriel there and took her out and laughed and put her back again.

After the interdict was placed on wooden images, the pair fell to playing "beggar-my-neighbour" and "old maid" in the long evenings after tea, but the possibilities of cards urged themselves too strongly for resistance, and after Weenie had gone to bed dramas were once more enacted, the cards themselves for puppets.

"You don't mind us pretending with cards, mama?" they had said, and Mrs. Conway, not quite comprehending, had told them to please themselves.

The queen of spades was Dolly's heroine now; she saw in her a dark little girl with flashing eyes and a propensity for getting into terrible mischief, and then dying with pious words of exhortation on her lips and all her weeping relatives around her bed. She was a unique mixture of Topsy and Eva, and Dolly named her Judy.

Phyl's heroine was the queen of hearts; the knave of diamonds, a handsome hero named Lochinvar; and on the knave of clubs was heaped all the villainy a heart of thirteen could conceive. The king of clubs with both was always the heavy father.

Aces were tiny babies, and fours and fives little children of the house. Tens were the servants,

spades and clubs being footmen, butlers, gardeners, and other "ancient retainers," while diamonds and hearts were housekeepers with stiff black silk dresses and bunches of jingling keys, pert ladies'-maids and nurses.

Both children always kept up a large establishment, and placed their characters in "old turreted mansions hoary with age," or Venetian palaces, or moated castles.

But when Phyl's fourteenth birthday came round she renounced for ever all puppets, and took with greater avidity to reading.

Dolly played a little longer. She had been bitten with the mania for collecting stamps and shells, and now being left lonely—for the card game lost interest without Phyl's companionship—shells served their turn as the bits of wood and cards had done.

Saturday afternoon, after they returned to Sydney, always found the little girls on some beach—Manly, Bondi, Coogee, or Bronté,—for it seemed a delightful thing to them that the seaside was to be reached at any time by a tram or boat ride, instead of waiting a whole year for three or four weeks of it as had been their English habit.

And lying on the beach Dolly could pursue her shell stories in the loveliest fashion, the best of materials to hand, and no fear of laughing detection.

On the crisp sand she drew her houses with all their different rooms, and placed in them her shell

inhabitants. One of the shells, a pretty bluish grey, was always "Mary," a model eldest sister; a tiny smooth scallop, snow-white, was "Muriel," who used to be chiefly occupied in dying. And a very bright, brown, thin one with black, irregular markings on it was always "Judy."

PART II

SCRIBBLING DAYS

CHAPTER XVII

RHYME AND RHYTHM

"I know of no sweeter emotion, and hardly of a greater one, than when a young man takes a sheaf of paper in his hand and, striding about his room, boldly resolves to turn it into MS."—JEAN PAUL RICHTER.

IN after years, when two of her little maids were actually among the army of the makers of books, Mrs. Conway used often to try to recollect what had been their earliest essay with a pen.

So far as her memory served, it was Dolly who first made the great plunge at the age of ten or eleven.

The child was shy with her for three or four days, hung about her in odd, half-ashamed nervousness burdened with her secret. Finally she crept up close and hid her face on an arm that was busily engaged cutting out pinafores for Weenie.

"I've—I've written something, mama," she whispered, pink as a peony.

The scissors went snip, snip, snip along the edge of the pattern.

"Have you, dear one?" the mother said, rather abstractedly; "is it another letter to me?"

Dolly shook her head. Letters were very common things. She and Phyl were always writing them and posting them, for reading at all hours of the day, in their mother's pocket. There were two there at the present time awaiting reading.

"MY DEAREST MAMA" (Dolly wrote),

"Isn't it a lovely day? I love bright days when the little birds go twitter-tweet and the sun laughs and the flowers look like pink and red fires all over the garden. Jennie is not very well to-day; I wish we were going to the seaside, then she would soon be well! Oh I do love the sand, when it feels warm and crunchy, and you can let it go sliping, sliping through your fingers and the weeney bits of silver and gold and diamonds shine in the sun. Oh I wish we were there padling in the frothy waves and making houses with the sand and little shells.

"I remain,

"Your lovingest of loving daughters,

"DOLLY."

"DARLING OLD MOTHER" (said Phyl),

"I've been reading such a lovely story, it was on the paper that came wrapped round the ironing. Geraldine Montmorency was going to be married to the Duke of something—I can't remember his name

—and she was very proud and only had black hair and there was a dear little governess and she had golden hair and she was ever so sweet and the children were horrid to her and Lady Geraldine used to be proud and haughty to her but the Duke kept noticing her and one day when he was walking in the wood he saw her sitting crying on the bank of a streme and all her beautiful golden hair had come undone and was streming down her back. And he asked her what was the matter and she wouldn't tell him. And he said 'Darling' in a hoarse whisper and begged her to speak and took her little hand in his great broad one. And she kept on crying and he kept on begging her. And then she put her little head on his strong shoulders and told him she was weping because he was going to marry the haughty Lady Geraldine. And he said he wouldn't because he didn't love her a bit and was only going to marry her because he was impoverished and there were mortgages on the estate — what are mortgages, mother? And so instead he eloped with the governess, and it turned out she was the real Lady Geraldine and she had been changed in her cradle for the other Lady Geraldine who was only a common farmer's daughter now.

"Oh, it was such a lovely story!

"I remain,

"Ever your loving daughter,

"PHYL."

"Then what have you been writing if it isn't a letter?" the mother said. "I hope a copy, Dolly; you and Phyl are the most shocking little writers I have ever seen."

"No; it isn't a copy," said Dolly. Her face grew redder than ever, and at last she produced from her pocket a scrap of paper whereon was writing in red ink.

Mrs. Conway took it a little hurriedly, for the pinafores were badly needed, and read the following first poem of her daughter:—

"BY THE SEA.

"Down in a mossy dell
Near to a little well
A busy little wren
Thus built its nest.

First of all it brought
Hay within its bill
Then to its young ones taught
To gather quills.

It wove them all together
And then the nest was made
And then they all lay down
Together in the shade."

Dolly was regarding her with anxious eyes.

"It—it *is* a poem, isn't it, mother?" she said shyly.

But the mother laughed,—for once in her life she was unsympathetic, and had no intuition as to the feelings of her little girl on this occasion. It seemed

only a funny thing to her that the child should write anything in verse.

"Oh, you little goose, Dolly," she said. "When did you ever see a bird's nest built of quills?"

Dolly looked a trifle saddened.

"It had to be something to go with bill," she said,

"It—it *is* a poem, isn't it, mother?"

and sighed. She was recollecting the struggle she had had with the word, and even now one word had an "s" and the other was without; yet it was impossible to make bill plural or quills singular.

The mother laughed again.

"And why did you call it 'By the Sea'?" she said. "There's not a wave in it anywhere."

"It sounded so nice," Dolly said forlornly.

"And all the birds I know of," Mrs. Conway said, "build the nest before the young ones come. Did you ever see wrens wait till the young ones could help with the building?"

Dr. Wise came in at this point, and Dolly slipped away, all the pleasurable elation at having "made something up" entirely gone. How could any one make up poetry if they had to be as careful of facts as this? It had seemed to her that as long as everything had "sounded right" nothing else mattered. Her cheeks burned as she ran away. She felt she had been silly again, and so ashamed was she that it was years before she ever attempted again to "drop into poetry."

Five years after Mrs. Wise's death the little boys had a mother again, and into the quiet life of Dolly, Phyl, and Weenie there stepped five riotous and ready-made brothers.

The lives of the two families had run too close together not to merge in the end.

When at the end of three years of the wretchedly-paying school Mrs. Conway was forced to pack up and go back to try another bout with the Fates in Sydney, Dr. Wise, lonely himself, and in despair at the thought of his lads growing up in miserable Sunnymeade without her gentle influence, came also to the city and started a suburban practice close by the little home she had made.

The death of an aunt about this time brought Mrs. Conway a little legacy, seventy pounds a year perhaps. The house she rented had a spare room; she took two boarders, a student and a clerk, and once again was just able to make a living. But life was fuller and pleasanter in every way here than in Sunnymeade, so small privations pressed less heavily.

It was after two years of this life that Dr. Wise finally persuaded the mother of the little maids to let who would take the house she had, and come into his that so sorely needed her.

And so there was another revolution in those small girls' lives, and once again fresh days and dreams presented themselves.

CHAPTER XVIII

TEN AT TABLE

THE half-past five train whistled shrilly at the station, and Phyl dropped hastily down from the low branch of the quince-tree where the afternoon sun had found and left her buried in *Comin' thro' the Rye.* She ran hastily up the orchard ; already small black specks were on the brow of the hill, and those same specks would enlarge and enlarge until in ten minutes they trooped up the garden-path and demanded dinner.

She set the table with hasty yet careful hand. There was only one servant in the house for all the work, unless one counted an imp of a boy of twelve, who answered the door to the patients, and cleaned the doctor's hard-worked bicycle, and occasionally took a weed out of the garden, and occasionally cleaned a window.

Knife and fork and spoon and fork, knife and fork and spoon and fork, up and down the long table Phyl went with her silver basket until ten places were set. Yellow chrysanthemums, grasses and autumn leaves

made a feast for the eyes in the centre; the cloth was snowy; the room, though plainly furnished, had a sunshiny, fresh, and dainty look that did the doctor's wife credit, considering the size of the double family.

Phyl's dress came down to her shoes, and she was still conscious of it. Her fair, wavy hair had not

Buried in *Comin' thro' the Rye.*

been twisted into that knot long enough for her to feel sure it would not come tumbling over her shoulders if she ran. Her complexion was still somewhat pale, but at eighteen her early delicacy was almost outgrown. Blue eyes looked thoughtfully out upon the world, but fun found plenty of

room to dance there too. There was a look of happiness about her mouth.

A little boy came into the room—Freddie, who had been a mere baby when Mrs. Wise died, but was now eight.

"Go and wash your face, Freddie," Phyl said, at the sound of his footstep, "and be sure to scrub your hands well—dinner will be ready in ten minutes."

But Freddie obtruded a face ashine with cleanliness, and a pair of passable hands, upon her notice, which had not been given to him before.

"I have washed myself, Phyl," he said mildly.

Phyl glanced at him and laughed.

"You must be dreadfully hungry," she said; "one can generally take it for granted that your hands are crying out for the scrubbing-brush. I believe, Freddie, before they let you into heaven the archangel who keeps the keys will say in a hollow voice, 'Frederick James Allison Wise, go back and wash your hands.'"

Freddie smiled rather nervously at the pleasantry and watched his sister uncertainly. Surely it was too much good fortune for him to expect that she had forgotten his afternoon's behaviour! He was her pupil, being considered as yet too young to go daily the long distance the others went to school, and this morning had she not fairly cried with rage and vexation over the daily struggle of his music lesson? And this afternoon when geography, and arithmetic,

and copy-books were all in neat readiness on the dining-room table, had he not slipped away entirely and gone to play marbles behind the stables with Davey, the impish house-boy?

Perhaps, he told himself relievedly at the sight of her calm face, she was appeased by the excellent washing he had given himself. What a very good thing he had thought of it!

Her eyes were straying about half abstractedly.

"Are you looking for anything,—shall I find it?" he said solicitously.

"Yes, the knife-sharpener, Freddie, have you seen it anywhere? Your father will call out if it isn't on the table."

Freddie looked about busily.

"Don't you bother, Phyl," he said kindly, "you just go on with your work, I'll find it for you."

"There's a good old laddie," Phyl said, and fell to smoothing the salt in the corner cruets.

Freddie had to steal out on to the verandah, where in the morning he had been engaged in a railway game, for which, for some occult reason of his own, he had used all the tools in the machine-drawer, the corkscrew, tin-opener, and egg-whisk from the kitchen, and from the dining-room the knife-sharpener He was always in hot water for mislaying these things, but if people had only known how admirably they had answered for his purpose, and how impossible it was to make anything else do, they would

hardly have grumbled so much ; and they would certainly never have presented him with mere shilling tin trains, with red and green and blue cars, and a stupid little motor that could do nothing, in the hope that with a "proper toy" he would let household articles alone.

He slipped into the dining-room with a beaming face.

"Here it is, Phyl," he said.

Phyl was stealing one more hasty page from Helen Mathers, seeing the gate had not yet banged.

"Um," she said, her eyes tearing along.

"I soon found it for you, didn't I?" he said.

"Good old laddie," Phyl murmured, feeling approval was required of her.

Freddie sat down in the rocking-chair, his heart full of affection for his eldest sister.

Up the path trooped all the home-comers. Weenie was in advance—such a long-legged girl with a bright little face, burnt brown as a berry, alert brown eyes, and her brown hair drawn back anyway to be out of the road, and plaited in a short, pert little plait. Her frock was too short for her—it always was, for there was no keeping up with her growth. On the knees of her black stockings there were networks of little holes. When Phyl saw them she would be sure to sigh and say, "I can't think how you get such holes. Those stockings were perfect this morning. You might consider me a little, Weenie."

And Weenie would be sure to reply, "I'm quite willing to go without stockings. I only wear them because you all seem to think it wouldn't be respectable not to. But if they get torn when I'm wearing them for your good, *I* can't help it."

Clif, twenty-one now and a man, came along slowly, his arm over Alf's shoulder, his hand gripping the younger boy's arm affectionately. Chatterbox Richie was close at Alf's other side; now and again he looked up at him with a curiously affectionate look, then promptly held his lips together as if fearful some secret should burst forth.

Alf was fourteen, short, rather thick-set, cheerfully ugly. But his hair, light-coloured, crisp, went back from his forehead in a lovable sort of wave, and his eyes were blue, soft, merry, mischievous, loving. Even when he was a baby he would give half his biscuit to a dog, and proffer his mug of milk-and-sugar to every one who came near him, with a hearty little "tate some." And now every one knew they could have whatever was Alf's, every one knew if Alf had sixpence they could get at least fourpence of it. Phyl went near to worshipping him; her love of him was more motherly than sisterly. The holes in his socks were never mentioned; the biggest tarts always went into his lunch-bag; he had a penwiper, a brush-and-comb-bag, and a very elaborate cricket cap, articles that no one had thought of making for the other boys. And he was a thoughtful little lad, and

really tried to remember to use the penwiper instead of his coat-sleeve, seeing the labour Phyl had put in it; and a courageous little lad, for he wore the elaborate cap dauntlessly at the school match, and only laughed good-temperedly when his fellows chaffed. Dolly and Ted brought up the rear. Ted, lanky and book-learned; Dolly, very like Phyl, but smaller and rosier. And her blue serge frock was still several inches away from the top of her shoes, seeing she was not yet sixteen, and her light, wavy hair was caught back into a loose curly plait and tied with dark-blue ribbon. She was carrying a strap full of school-books in one hand, and a tennis-racquet and a roll of papers in the other.

Phyl came on to the verandah.

"Wasn't mother in the train?" she said.

Ted nodded.

"She saw the governor's bike outside the Rileys', and waited to walk home with him," he said.

"Was—was the German mail in?" Phyl's eyes widened apprehensively as she put the question.

"Yes," said Ted briefly.

Alf was almost up the steps and on a level with her by this, and she put a sudden arm around his neck and clung to him one moment.

"Don't be a little donkey," Ted said gruffly, a warning look in his eyes.

Phyl obediently let go her hold of the boy, who had been so engrossed with something Richie was

telling about the football that he had hardly heeded the caress.

Twenty minutes later Dr. Wise was running his carving-knife up and down the sharpener Freddie had so kindly found, and looking round on his assembled family with the keen, kind eyes that saw everything so quickly. Perhaps his glance rested more tenderly on Alf to-night than on any one else.

Mrs. Wise, at the other end of the table, had some sprays of jonquils in her dress. They were not out yet in the garden, but Clif had seen the early ones in town and brought a few for "the little mother."

There was a book on the table beside her—*Transcendentalism.* Ted had been at the greatest pains to borrow it for her and bring it home, because he had been so engrossed in it himself. And busy as she was, and not a bit interested in the subject, she would find time to read it just because of that.

"Any one call, Phyl?" she said.

"Yes, I'm dreadfully sorry, mother," Phyl said, "but Mrs. Marriott and Mrs. and Miss Anderson came."

"Why sorry?" said the doctor,—"too much waste of your valuable time? I thought you had a great admiration for Mrs. Marriott?"

"I was down the orchard," Phyl said; "Mary couldn't find me, and said every one was out. I—was reading."

"You weren't reading too much, I hope, to darn that table-cloth, Phyl?" Mrs. Wise said.

"Sixpence she was," said Ted. "Bet you she was in the apple-tree all day."

"Wrong for once, my beautiful youth," Phyl answered; "the table-cloth is a miracle of fine workmanship, mother. Further, I did the elbows of Weenie's blue frock, likewise Alf's hat, ditto two pairs of Richie's socks, not to mention doing the vases and thirty-nine other articles of domestic necessity. Don't you think the quince-tree was entitled to receive me, doctor?"

"I do," said the doctor; "indeed I think there are about twenty-nine articles too many in that day's work. Weenie, can't you keep your elbows in? Richie, we must put you in copper-toed socks. We mustn't take all the little girl's time, mother."

"Oh," said Mrs. Wise, "when I am at home there is more leisure. Besides, it is good for cobwebs, isn't it, Phyl?"

"I should think driving multiplication into that little beggar Fred would be a safe preservative against all cobweb forming," said Clif.

Then Phyl looked at Freddie, and Freddie looked at Phyl.

Phyl's last recollection of Freddie was at about two o'clock, when he was, with many protests, getting out his lesson-books for the afternoon. He had the capes and rivers of New South Wales to learn, so in

the meantime she thought she would occupy the quince-tree. And this was her next thought of him!

The pink ran into her cheeks; she opened her mouth to confess her forgetfulness.

But at that alarming crisis Freddie spilt his tea; all over the clean cloth it went, and all over his own hands. It was some time before order was restored, for Mary had to bring a tea-cloth and mop up the wet place, and Mrs. Wise had to scold a little, for a soiled cloth was a real trial to her, and then put flour on the hands that Freddie persisted were scalded.

In the confusion Phyl forgot to confess, but Freddie was apprehensive, and kept a watchful eye upon her.

"Well, my editress," said the doctor, "and how does your learned and valuable magazine progress?"

"Oh," said Dolly with a sigh, "there are five more columns empty, and we have to send it to the printer to-morrow. We'll both have to do something more to-night, Phyl."

"But your lessons, dear!" said Mrs. Wise, "the examination is only a month away. Couldn't you make the paper later this quarter?"

"If it isn't out on the first of the month," Dolly said sadly, "all the girls spend their pocket-money, and can't buy it."

"Tell you," said Richie, "we had an A1 football match against the Grammar—write all about that, Phyl."

"Oh, Richie," said Dolly, impatiently.

"It 'ud be a great deal interestinger than things about your silly tennis, and tea-parties, and cookery-notes," said Richie hotly.

"And about green hats being the dominant note this spring in Paris," quoth Clif.

"I didn't write that," said Dolly, "some one else does Fashion."

"If you like," said Ted, "I'll give you enough for a column on Psychic Research."

"I'm afraid no one would read it," Dolly said dubiously. "Couldn't you write a story, Ted? I'm sure you could if you tried; it's very easy."

But the learned one would not commit himself to such frivolity; if they wouldn't have his article on Psychic Research they must go without.

Dolly sighed.

"Well, if we can't fill up all the columns to-night, I'll catch it," she said.

Suddenly Alf pushed back his chair with a loud noise, and jumped as if he had been bitten by Davey, who was helping Mary to remove the meat-plates.

"Good old Jingo, good old Jingo," he cried, making for the door.

"Alf, Alf," remonstrated Mrs. Wise.

But Davey's whisper of "Jingo's caught five rats, Master Alf," had been too exciting for the boy to remember manners.

He gave his step-mother a sudden, breathless hug as he passed her.

"Be quick down and have a look, darling," he said, and shot himself out of the room.

"Did the letter come?" Phyl asked, with very anxious eyes on her mother.

"They want him to go next month," said Mrs. Wise.

Silence fell on the table; every one's heart and nearly every one's eyes were filled. Alf, bright-eyed, jolly little thick-set Alf to be going away from them, thousands of miles away—why, it was as if Death had stalked suddenly into the room and selected the merriest of them all for its victim!

"Next month!" gasped Phyl.

"They have a representative here at present," said the doctor. "His passage is taken by the *Ormuz*. We must tell the lad soon."

But what a thing to tell a home-loving laddie! The dead mother's people had made overtures at last. There were only a father and a spinster sister left, for death had broken up their proudly serried ranks of late, and the spirits of those remaining were broken too—in a certain degree.

When Mrs. Wise died they went to Sunnymeade for the funeral, and there saw Alf. The other four boys they took no notice of, for they were all their father's boys entirely; Alf alone had the eyes and hair and manner the grandfather remembered in his

daughter when she was a child, and dear to his heart. More than this, Alf was "Alfred Wyndham Mergell Wise," every name his grandfather's. They were asking now to have him given to them entirely. The old man had been a merchant, and had made a big fortune; the daughter had a large income of her own,—all would be Alf's, for they had no other relatives they cared to think of leaving it to. The boy would have the best of educations—English public school life followed by Oxford—and could choose for himself among all the professions. He would have the advantage of travel, for the grandfather had left Australia for ever, and wintered on the Continent, and spent the summer in England. The doctor felt he must accept the offer. He himself could give the boy no advantages; his very schooling at a second-rate grammar-school was a serious item, and the future he could not even think of, crippled as he was with such a family and so narrow a purse. Clif and Ted were fighting their way into the world without help from him; Alf would certainly be forced to do the same, had he only his father to depend upon. And the boy had not much strength of will or perseverance; left to himself he would probably twenty years hence be occupying almost the same place in whatever office he was placed in now. It was plain it would be madness to refuse the offer; in after years the boy would be sure to upbraid them did they follow their own inclination.

They had not told him yet, not wishing to unsettle him before all was decided, but the rest of the family knew, and their eyes used to follow his comings-in and goings-out, and their hearts would swell at his merry chatter.

"A month!" Phyl echoed again.

Mrs. Wise forced the tremble from her voice.

"Here he is coming from the garden," she said. "Your father is obliged to go out till nine, but when he comes back we are going to tell him. Please every one be quiet and just as usual until we call him into the drawing-room to us; I don't want it broken to him in any careless fashion."

CHAPTER XIX

GWENDOLEN TREVALLION AND A SOLDIER BRAVE AND TRUE

"Some blank verse and blanker prose,
And more of both than any one knows."

So every one took up their usual evening employment. Clif and Mrs. Wise played chess in the drawing-room, and Ted in a quiet corner not far away buried himself in a book. In the dining-room Alf and Richie and Weenie, when it could no longer be postponed, got out their books to prepare their home-lessons, and the two latter, as a customary preliminary, played "French and English" on their slates, until Phyl heard the tell-tale sounds of "I've got a gun," "Two tents now," "Hurrah, all my men have legs!" "Shot—t—t," and unkindly separated them.

Alf with his fingers in his ears wrestled with the onus of proving that "the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal," and occasionally refreshed himself by telling Phyl interesting anecdotes about rat-catching fox-terriers. Dolly, with a great bundle

of books and papers, retreated up to her bedroom, for real work down-stairs was an impossibility. She put on a jacket against the spring cold, and she lifted the jug and basin and soap-dish off the wash-stand.

It was a very roomy old wash-stand with a marble top, necessarily concealed by a toilet-cover, for its whiteness was for ever seamed with irregular veins of ink. It bore also dabs of Prussian blue and sepia and vermilion, testifying to the fact that Dolly sometimes forsook the pen for the brush. Indeed Dolly's energy from the age of sixteen to eighteen was a thing to wonder at. Phyl went on more quietly, reading, writing, helping in the house, teaching Freddie. But Dolly pursued everything. *The Girls' Own Paper* was her stimulating friend at the time, and she was always anxious to try every experiment or suggestion it gave.

There was a time when ginger-jars and old bottles painted various colours and with strange excrescences upon them were foisted by her on the rest of the family as ornaments for the different rooms. That was when the articles on "Imitation Barbotine Pottery" were running. Even Freddie was interested in this craze of Dolly's. It was pleasant to see her bring an old bottle into the house, after persuading Clif to knock half the neck off very neatly, and to watch it being painted in delightfully merging shades of blue. And the next day's work was always absolutely fascinating. Putty was obtained from the glazier's—Freddie

always went to buy it himself—threepence worth. Dolly used to knead this, roll it and make it smooth with water, and then with sharp bits of wood cut out strange leaves and flowers. Sometimes she made berries by squeezing little putty balls in mosquito-net; Freddie loved this. This vegetation was with much pains made to adhere to the blue bottles and ginger-jars, and then painted over. The effect was quite handsome—until a week or two's time or Freddie's itching fingers made the excrescent spiky leaves and sprays crumble off and leave white patches. When articles appeared on "The Difficulties of a Young Housekeeper, and How She Overcame Them," Dolly was ever to be found in the kitchen labelling all the store bottles with immaculate labels, making "Fairy Butter," "Dutch Scrambled Eggs," and trying to persuade Mary to cook potatoes after a new method.

She started a museum, a collection of skeleton leaves, a bush house; she wheedled Clif into making her an easel, and she bought big sheets of Bristol board—canvases were too expensive—and painted away, with green and yellow pigment in dabs on her pink cheeks, at Red Riding Hoods and Cinderellas whose anatomy would have made an artist shriek, lurid sunsets, seascapes, with strangely-shaped boats sailing full in the wind's eye.

She had a music craze, and in a month gave the piano more work than she usually did in a year. She decided to learn to sing, and when the boys were all

away, practised vocal exercises from a book of her mother's until Phyl and Mrs. Wise took to sitting in the orchard to be out of the sound. Sometimes Mrs. Wise grew rather anxious. "Everything attempted and nothing done," she said to her husband. "What sort of a training for her?"

But the doctor thought nothing of it. "It is only youthful effervescence," he said; "more of it perhaps than most girls have. Before long she will settle down and put her whole heart into some one thing."

At the present time she ought to have been putting her whole heart into her examination, which loomed close, but she merely placed her Cicero and her Euclid and *The Essay on Man* in a stack on the wash-stand to be in readiness when she could spare time, and fell to covering sheets of exercise-book paper with the woes of one Gwendolen Trevallion. And her spirits, saddened at the news about Alf, caused her to drown Gwendolen with detail and gloom, and many harrowing last words.

Next week when the paper came out, the impressionable ones among the school-girls would weep at the sad end of the heroine, whose chequered career they had followed in very short chapters for months. And but for Alf she might have been left alive to pursue her adventures indefinitely. But Dolly also wept as she wrote; the tears invariably ran down her cheeks when she was engaged in killing any one, but

she never flinched from a detail of the death on that account.

"And now," she wrote, when the evening waxed late, and she knew a certain number of those lesson-books must at all events be looked at, "now at length Gwendolen was left alone—alone with death. Yes, she could deceive herself no longer; before the man could lay down Ermentrude, for whom she had given her life, and swim back to her through the voracious, clamouring sea" (it need hardly be said that Gwendolen had gone to save Ermentrude, who had ventured on to a dangerous part of the coast and was cut off by the tide), "the waves would be dashing high above the narrow ledge where she stood, and she would be 'where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.' So young, so fair for death she seemed. She was clad in a simple white muslin dress, her deep violet eyes with their long sweeping black lashes looked like frightened stars, her heavy golden waves of hair blew out with the wind" (any one's hair but Gwendolen's would have been wet, seeing she had been in the water), "and seemed to make a halo for her face. No cry of anguish rose to her sweet white lips as the last wave rolled up for its victim . . . a holy solemn light shone in her eyes; already the scales of this dim earthly vision seemed falling from them, already she seemed to see beyond the veil—the veil white Death alone can lift.

"The advancing wave rolled up and broke . . . sweeping over the rock, shooting its spray high into

the air and retreating, leaving the ledge vacant. Gwendolen was gone . . . gone to a fairer heritage than earth . . . gone Home.

"'Break, break, break,
On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.
And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!'"

Neither Phyl nor Dolly would have dreamed of ending a story of any kind without some favourite verse; there were even times when the end of the story shaped itself so that a particular verse might be worked in.

Down-stairs, just after the dinner-things had been cleared away, Phyl had looked at Freddie, and Freddie looked at Phyl.

"I wonder," was Phyl's thought, shame in her heart at having neglected his studies so badly during the day, "I wonder if I could coax him to do some parsing now to make up."

And Freddie had quaked beneath her blue considering eye.

"I'm in for it now," he thought to himself.

"What are you going to do to-night, Freddie?" she said, and actually stroked his round little head.

Freddie kept his head very still under her hand, but stole an amazed glance at her through his eye-

lashes—the affectionate diminutive of his name, and a caress!

"Oh," he said in his kindest and most hearty little way, "I thought I'd just do a bit of gography for you, Phyl dear, I don't know my capes *very* well, do I?"

And he actually sat down without much ado and committed them to memory, to Phyl's deepest astonishment. Just before nine she went up-stairs to Dolly, her old tin hat-box in her hand.

"There's that essay of mine on Moral Rectitude," she said, "that will fill a column."

"Oh, yes," Dolly said, "I'd forgotten that, and I liked it *very* much."

She took the closely-written sheets from her sister and glanced through them, deep admiration on her face. Phyl had of late, after a somewhat severe course of reading Ruskin, Emerson, and Marcus Aurelius, abjured story-writing for a time, and fallen instead to composing essays on high and abstruse subjects. They were written in a very lofty strain, contained as many quotations as she could possibly put in, and were full of moral reflections.

"But you said you'd write a poem too," said the ever rapacious little editor. Phyl had been on the staff of the paper until a year ago, when she left school, and she was still always pressed into the service to help to fill up yawning columns, for the body of school-girls very, very seldom furnished any

work, and the editor and staff were often hard pushed for material.

Phyl produced her poem, not without anxiety on her face for her sister's opinion; they criticized each other very frankly, these two, and hard truths often

"Oh, Phyl, it's beautiful!"

flew, though on frequent occasions they yielded each other the warmest admiration.

Dolly read the many verses, her eyes kindling at the end.

"Oh, Phyl, it's beautiful!" she said; "it's the very best thing you've done—oh, Phyl!"

And Phyl herself had had a secret idea that it was a masterpiece.

The poem was about a soldier who clasped a fair maiden in his arms in anguished farewell, then "light to his saddle prest—

"Away o'er the grassy plain, far away thro' the stilly air,
Away from all that was lovely,—away from all that was fair."

The maiden of course languished through several verses. Indeed all the school-girls would have been quite hurt had she stayed healthily alive to welcome her lover back from his wars.

"'Good-bye to sadness and sorrow! Good-bye to parting and pain.
Oh, welcome to death,' she cries, 'which binds us together again.'"

And the soldier at last comes spurring back from the battle only to find—

"'Tis over, the hope and the love, the dream of his earthly life,
Sorrow has taken his goblet up and filled it with sadness and strife.
And now a broken and saddened man bends over a grassy grave,
'Tis but the ghost of the lover, the soldier so strong and brave.
'Oh, what are fame and glory?' cries he in his anguish sore.
'Oh, love, thou art all I care for, wilt thou never come back to me more?'

And the river, the silent river, flowing onward into the sea,
And the willows bending and waving thro' the air so sweet and free,
Seem whisp'ring low the story of the soldier loving and brave,
Of the maiden true and tender—of the grassy, silent grave,
Of the end of fame and glory, of riches which too soon rust,
Of the end of all things earthly—only the crumbling dust."

How beautiful that poem seemed to them at the time! Perhaps nothing either of them ever wrote in after years afforded them such exquisite satisfaction. Dolly glowed all over with pride in her sister and pride in herself that she should have so beautiful a poem for her beloved paper. And at Dolly's praises the modest poetess exulted more and more; she even had a rapt vision before she slept that night, of a sweet little volume, in willow green, entitled "Sea Fancies," or "Rose Petals," bearing on its front page the words, "By Phyllida Rankin Conway," and on the next, "Dedicated to my sister, Dorothy Rankin Conway."

From the window, as she stood up to reach her school-books, Dorothy saw the doctor's silent flying figure come down the moonlit road, and three minutes later there came the dull sound of the bicycle's wheels along the verandah.

Both girls instantly laid down paper and pens and went down-stairs.

CHAPTER XX

THE 'GERMAN SAUSAGE' LAND

"No pretence
To intellectual eminence,
Or scholarship sublime."

THE dining-room was in an uproar, and it was to be feared nobody's home-lessons were well done. Weenie had had a map of Europe to do; she also had recently expended the sum of a shilling on a box of coloured crayons. As a natural result she had devoted a bare five minutes to an unrecognizable outline of the Continent, and spent the rest of the evening in making a Joseph's coat of it. The boys all insisted in having a voice in the selection of colours. Weenie had considered pink would look well for France, seeing she had coloured the Channel and Bay of Biscay a deep indigo, and Belgium and Holland two shades of green. But Alf, fresh from *A Tale of Two Cities*, insisted it must be dyed incarnadine.

"But I've done Spain red," objected the artist.

"Rub some blue over the red, then," Alf said.

"Purple is the right colour for Spain; the people there always have purple eyes and hair."

So Weenie selected the most brilliant among her reds, and made France lurid. Italy, by unanimous consent, was blue, a paler tint than the sea. Germany, Richie contended, must be coloured to resemble German sausage, that being, as he said, the chief export of the place; so great pains were expended with dark crimson and dabs of white.

"Well, at all events, we'll do Russia pink," Weenie said, eager to cover all that great expanse with the salmon-coloured stick, which worked more easily than the others.

But Alf would not suffer this either. "No," he said, "it's got to be yellow,—think of all the convicts there." And Weenie had to be content for Norway and Switzerland to be the only countries blushing delicately.

"Why," said Richie, "there's a pretty map! She's forgotten Greece altogether, and she's got no Black Sea in at all, and all her Germany and Austria are not as big as Belgium!"

Weenie looked vexedly at the place Greece should have occupied.

"I *always* forget that horrid little place," she said. "Stick it in for me, Alf; you do it more neatly than I."

So Alf performed upon the brilliant map. He was rather quick with his fingers, and he introduced the

country of story and song so skilfully one could not have guessed it had ever been missing. But then Weenie's handiwork led his fingers into temptation. She always enjoyed drawing Italy because it was like a leg, just as the resemblance to a leg of mutton made South America pleasant and easy to outline. And even to-night, while all the rest of Europe's lines were scamped, she had taken pains to give a shapely toe and a high heel to the land of sunshine. What wonder if Alf added a high boot with many green buttons and a green toe-cap? What wonder if his pencil ran north and added eyes, and, where necessary, chins to the mouths and noses Weenie intended to indicate Norway's blue fiords and jagged promontories? Spain with a long-lashed eye placed just at Coimbra, a nostril added to the nose where Lisbon lies, and a black-pointed beard continued below Cape St. Vincent, personified itself; and the "German Sausage Land," in the twinkling of a crayon, resolved itself into a particularly fat and solid-looking cat. But Weenie at the sight of the ruin actually burst into tears. There was a prize to be given, it seemed, for the best map, and she had felt so admirable a colour-scheme as hers could not fail to win it. All the time she was putting in the Ural Mountains and the Alps, with Dolly's finicking little pen, she was imagining a scene in school in which the head-teacher stood up and said, "Prize for best workmanship as displayed in map of Europe, Wilhelmina Conway."

And now that booted Italy, that feline Fatherland!

Alf looked quite dismayed, for Weenie was not in the least given to tears.

"I never thought you'd mind," he said; "you never care how many blots you have. I'm awfully sorry, old girl. Here, you pay me out—you scribble all over this blessed Euclid I had to do for old Brownlow," and he held out the problems he had worked. But the method he proposed appealed to Weenie's humour, and a little laugh bubbled out amidst the tears.

"No," she said, "that wouldn't do me any good. Come here and I will scribble on you."

Alf, relieved at her averted wrath, promptly presented his face, and she gave him green eyebrows, a red tip on his nose, and a moustache of ultramarine. Of course that made a clown of him, and he treated them extempore to various antics and witticisms brought home from a circus. Phyl came in at the door just as he finished walking round the table on his hands.

"Alf," she said, and there came a choking little sound in her voice as she looked at his happy face, "doctor and mother want you in the drawing-room, dear."

Alf did not notice her voice, nor Richie's drooped jaw, nor Weenie's startled air of sudden remembrance.

"Stand clear of the gangway, then," he cried, and

Phyl moved hastily aside in time to allow him to make his exit turning brilliant Catherine-wheels through the door, across the passage, and, with a skilful twist, right into the drawing-room.

In the dining-room nobody spoke for a long time. Dolly went to the window and stood looking out at the willow-trees and grass; and once she broke the silence by laughing in a queer little way, for Jingo was on the path engaged in tearing an old sock to bits, and once he tossed it up in the air and tried to catch it on his nose in the way Alf taught him to catch lumps of sugar. Richie went to Dolly's side to look also, and they put their arms round each other for comfort as they stood waiting. Phyl presently picked up the geography-book.

"Be saying your gulfs, Freddie," she said. But when Freddie, also distraught, made the grave statement that the Gulf of Carpentaria was the chief gulf in Victoria, and Broken Bay was the harbour of Perth, she allowed it to go uncontradicted.

Clif and Ted were in the room too, now.

"Poor little beggar!" Clif said, and puffed vigorously at his pipe.

There came a quick clatter across the passage, and Alf burst into their midst again with eyes blazing wrathfully under their green brows, and the blue moustache twitching with the muscles of his face.

"I won't," he said stormily. "Don't you imagine I'm going, any of you. No dirty Germanies for me,

thank you. If you want their dirty money go yourselves, all of you."

"Wish I had the chance," Ted said. "You don't know when you're well off, Alf. None of us ever had such a chance of education."

"Education!" Little Alf fairly snorted with wrath. "As if I don't get enough now with old Brownlow to make me sick of everything. Here I'm about as stuffed up with their beastly Latin and Euclid as I can be, and you want to choke some more on me."

"Well, think of the pleasure to be derived from rolling in money," said Clif. "You'll be the important person of the family, Alf; we shall all take our hats off to you when we meet you."

"I'd rather roll in mud!" said the fierce, small youth. "Sixpence a week's all I want—you wouldn't think the Pater 'ud grudge me that!"

The doctor came behind him and laid a quiet hand on his shoulder. "Alf," he said.

"W—wouldn't think you'd g—g—grudge me sixpence a week," blubbered Alf, struggling away and dashing his fist so rapidly across his ashamed eyes one green eyebrow was smeared half-way down his cheek.

"Alf," said the doctor again, and Alf, looking up, found tears also in the keen fatherly eyes.

The fierce young muscles relaxed, his head drooped.

"G—g—grudge me s—s—sixpence," he repeated,

the tears gushing out in self-pity. His father put an arm round his shoulder and led him out very quietly.

"S—s—s—sixpence," they heard the sobbing voice repeating just as the drawing-room door closed again.

* * * * *

It was an hour before he came back. He walked in to them then very slowly. His eyes were swollen, half the poor blue moustache was washed away and the red tip of the nose no longer startled, for all the face was puffy and reddened.

Phyl longed to console, but dare not endanger that brittle fortitude. She did not know that the tears were running down her cheeks as fast as they were down Dolly's, who was holding up Richie's French exercise-book to hide them.

"Well, old chap," said Clif.

"Are you going?" said Weenie, breathlessly.

Alf stuck his hands deeper than ever in his pockets.

"Course I am," he said jerkily.

"That's sensible, old fellow," Clif said; "of course it's a wrench, but you'd be the first to blame the Pater if he let you lose the chance now."

"Oh, would I?" said little Alf. The fit of coughing that followed accounted of course for the fresh tears in his eyes.

"I'd give my very head to be in your place," sighed Ted. It chafed his spirit to think of the German Universities and Libraries, travel, mixing with clever men, being wasted on this unwilling

young Goth, while he must go hungry for them all his days.

"I'd give—your head—too," was little Alf's answer, made staccato for safety.

"But you really are a lucky young dog, you know,' Clif said; "a fortune to your hand—two fortunes perhaps! I wish I'd had a cherubic smile, Alf, and a love-curl, and eyes of blue when the old gentleman and the little wisp of a lady came along."

"Look here," said Alf, and he got up and tumbled his heap of books as usual into the book-cupboard, "I've promised the Pater I'll go, but I've got another month to have fun in, and if any one speaks to me about that dirty German sausage place I'll fight him."

Then they separated for bed.

CHAPTER XXI

'GOOD-BYE, GOOD-BYE!'

"Now is not this ridiculous?
Now is not this preposterous?
A thorough-paced absurdity,
Explain it if you can."

ALF was gone.

In his bedroom there still hung his old school-suit, his sunburnt hat, his shabby mackintosh—Phyl could not realize that he would never again come stamping and clattering up the stairs to put any of them on. Richie was to have the clothes now, but it gave them all a sharp pang the first time he wore the green-black rain-coat that still seemed to have beneath it Alf's solid little figure.

Phyl emptied the pockets of the coat herself, before it was transferred to Richie. String, stamps, bits of pencil, a padlock, several nails, several marbles, a penny dreadful, some peach-stones, a conversation-peppermint with "Name the day" upon it, three pocket-knives, a bit of rope tied in ingenious knots, two or three ends of match-boxes, the major half of a

cigarette that had made the boy no one knew how ill,—all these things she emptied tenderly from the pockets into a collar-box and carried them off to her own room.

Mr. Mergell's agent had been to the house two or three times; a burly, kind-eyed German, with a delightfully broken accent; they all liked him immediately. He had unlimited credit to set up Alf's wardrobe for the voyage—in the words of his grandfather—as "befitted a gentleman." Even Alf himself took a passing interest in the ever-arriving parcels. Mrs. Wise did the shopping as requested on an unstinted scale, and Richie and Freddie and the girls were filled with admiration at the beautiful things that kept arriving,—a cabin-box, a handsome tan Gladstone bag, a portmanteau that turned at need into a bath, a little dressing-case with "A. W. M. W." upon a silver plate, half-a-dozen suits, hats, shoes and boots, shirts, even white gloves for dances aboard.

"If it were any one but Alf," said Mrs. Wise as she packed, "the transition from two suits—one bad and the other worse—to all this luxury would make a coxcomb of him. But Alf is safe, so we may as well please the grandfather and the aunt."

The great steamer went out on a Saturday, and all the family went on board to view the cabin, to see the luggage well disposed, and to catch the last glimpse of the lad.

He wore one of his new suits, a well-cut blue serge,

his boots creaked, his straw hat was immaculate—all these things added to his misery.

The parting hour fled past. The boys had tramped all over the decks to see the workings of the mammoth creature that soon would be quivering with life; the girls had explored the magnificent white and gold saloon, the music-room, the splendid state-rooms, all so different from the plain though comfortable boat that had seen their voyaging.

But now the last bell had gone and the last straggler been hurried off. The gangways were cast off and dragged in, the great black side that had lain motionless against the wharf, very, very slowly began to move along. Alf was leaning over the upper deck-rail, his chin on his hands, his hat tilted over his eyes: the burly German was beside him, trying to cheer his spirits, but the lad looked down at the dear, upturned faces, and his heart seemed bursting. Then a strange thing happened on deck; there came a boy's shout, so familiar a shout that the doctor and his family turned their eyes alarmedly in the direction.

And lo! the pressing passengers divided in one place, and a little wild-eyed boy sprang up on the seat.

"Hi there, stop, hold hard, I'm not going!" he yelled.

"Freddie!" gasped Mrs. Wise; she had seen him actually off the boat, held his hand indeed down the gangway, but once off—he was a big boy now—she had not thought of him.

And now there he was, hatless, shouting, gesticulating among the passengers bound for the continent of Europe."

"Hi there, stop!" he screamed again, his voice grown shrill with terror; "let me off; hi there! make the captain stop, father! Clif, get me off, make him stop, can't you!"

Alf and the agent rushed down the deck to the small, frantic youth, and there quickly sprang up in the little crowd several officers.

Freddie was almost beside himself; he shrank away from his astonished brother; he fought himself free of the burly German's hands; they had to hold him firmly, or he would have gone bodily over the vessel's side.

The officers acted with the promptitude necessary seeing the vessel was almost past the wharf now, and no one seemed anxious to have the boy's company as far as Melbourne. Freddie found them tying a rope round his waist and making arm-loops for him with another one. He quietened a little while they did this, only his heaving chest and streaming eyes showing the agitation under which he was labouring.

"Perhaps he had better come on to Melbourne, Mr. Johansen," said the first officer gloomily to the third who was roping Freddie.

But at this Freddie began to kick and give vent to such heart-broken howls that the third officer, father of sundry small boys, said he thought they could manage to deposit him.

They hallooed to a rowing-boat to come up, and the boatman approached as closely as he might. Then Freddie was lowered slowly down the side by a couple of sailors; the girls and Mrs. Wise shut their eyes one fearful minute when they saw the little dangling body and terrified white face.

The next second he swung out a little; one man in

One man in the boat caught him.

the boat caught him, the other swept the boat round and out of the way.

A loud cheer went up from ship and wharf when the child was put on the solid ground once more.

"Good heavens, boy, what did you do that for?" said the doctor in natural irritation at finding

himself and family the cynosure of every one's observation.

But Freddie was beyond excusing himself. Dolly's arms opened for him, and he made a rush for such a haven. Phyl closed in at the other side to help to soothe and comfort. Alf carried away with him, as the last bit of home, the sight of the two girls in their blue serge dresses and sailor hats looking after him with drenched blue eyes, and at the same time trying to pat and soothe to quietness the boy who was burying his head on Dolly's arm.

The kindly German tried to direct his attention to the fussy little pilot-boat, to the sailor who was hanging by his teeth, it seemed, from the rigging. But Alf's eyes gazed wharfward till the last flutter of a handkerchief faded, then he gulped very hard and disappeared till dinner-time; when, it must be confessed, roast ducklings and the choice of half-a-score of delicious puddings went far to assuaging his grief.

Freddie travelled home with his family, hatless. From time to time during the journey he drew a sobbing breath, as if the recollection was too much for him; but it was not till he was in bed at night, and Dolly tucking him comfortably in, that he would give any explanation of his conduct.

Then it came out, bit by bit. Alf looked so miserable, and it seemed so dreadful a thing to be going alone across the great ocean, that he (Freddie), in a sudden

fit of brotherly love and self-abnegation, had resolved to accompany him.

The struggle was a hard one, and was fought manfully out on the wharf after the bell had rung for the boat to be cleared. No one to look at him could have guessed of the tumult that was going on beneath the white chest flannel of his sailor coat.

On the one hand there was his home, and all his happiness, a comfortable bed, and sisters or a mother to tuck him up and give the good-night kiss.

And then there was Alf, poor Alf, up there biting his poor lips, trying to smile down at them, crushing his hat over his eyes—walking away from the side, then coming back again, and looking, looking, looking! Yes, he would give up everything, and accompany him into his exile.

He slipped his hand from out his mother's and mingled again with the crowd. Amid the stream coming down from the boat, and the hurrying stragglers going up, who was to notice so insignificant a person as a small boy, in a sailor suit, pressing upwards? Once on deck he did not join Alf. He quite understood he must be a stowaway, and hide all the voyage in Alf's cabin. For the present he crushed his small body into a space between two hen-coops. And then at last the quiver of life ran through the great inert vessel, and then the bells rang, and the straining sound of the ropes ceased, and the engines began to work, and sailors rushed

hither and thither, and officers called out instructions, and the men not on duty sat and looked sleepily at the frothing waters.

Freddie's courage oozed away as rapidly as it had risen. After all, he would not go;—no, it was too much to ask. Who knows what horrible things would await him in that far land, away from father and mother and sisters? No; he would get off at once while he could, and Alf must go alone—after all, perhaps, he would not mind so very much.

He extricated himself from his cramped position and scurried along the deck in the hopes of meeting the captain. But the ship's movement continued, and a frenzied glance to the side showed the gangways entirely gone, and the wharf slipping slowly, slowly, slowly back.

It was then that the horror of his situation mastered him and made him break through the crowd at the side, leap on to the seat, and implore, with sobs and tears, for the ship to stop.

"S—s—stay with us, Dolly," he whimpered, when, at the end of the recital, everything seemed so vivid again he could hardly believe his little bed was secure. So Dolly, seeing his agitation was not even yet calmed down, brought a green volume of *Alice*, and read the Tweedledum and Tweedledee battle, and the moving tale of the Walrus and the Carpenter, until sleep conquered the excitement.

CHAPTER XXII

THE WRITING-ROOM

IT very early became necessary that Phyl and Dolly should have some sort of a room in which to write quite to themselves.

A sudden gust of wind in the house would bring scraps of papers floating from everywhere, and if any one had troubled to pick them up and read them, the eye would be sure to be met with some such choice literary morsel as, "With a smothered oath, the Earl flung away his half-smoked Havana, and ground his heel into the gravel;" or, "She drew her willowy figure up proudly, and gave him a look of scorn from her starry violet eyes."

And when, on Dolly leaving school, the two girls, lost without the school paper, resolved to bring out a girls' magazine, a secluded room for editorial purposes was more than ever necessary.

Mary, coming in to lay the lunch-cloth, would be met by an agonized entreaty from the editors for just ten more minutes, and the big table was always so

littered up with stacks of paper, that Mary, impressed by the business-like look, generally yielded, and lunch was in consequence frequently half-an-hour late.

Or an early afternoon visitor would be shown into the drawing-room just in time to see a girl rise up from the floor with startled eyes, hastily gather up the papers from the sofa-table, and beat a hurried retreat.

Sometimes the two wrote in their bedrooms.

Phyl had a tiny room to herself, but Dolly and Weenie slept together. Phyl had an old writing-table against one wall, and just the other side of the partition stood Dolly's wash-stand.

And no one knew how often Phyl had to spring up from her work, and with wrathful eyes seek the neighbouring apartment, to request Dolly to "stop that wretched tapping," for Dolly had a vexatious habit, in moments when words failed her, of sitting with dreamy eyes in front of her wash-stand and tap, tapping at the wall with her idle pen.

And no one knew how often Dolly had to get up and move her chair to allow Weenie to pass into the room. It was a small room, and the furniture almost filled it; when the young editor was seated on her chair there was not one inch of space for any one to pass to one part of the room, for the big bed reached just to the chair.

Dolly used to groan when she heard Weenie coming.

"Look here, Weenie, this is the fifth time this morning," she would say, exasperated, "you can't come past me again."

"Oh, can't I?" Weenie would retort; "I want something out of my drawer, and I'm going to have it."

"Well, climb over the bed," Dolly would entreat, "I'm in *such* an important place."

If Weenie were in a mild mood she would comply, and scramble across the bed to her set of drawers. But as a rule the sight of Dolly's flushed cheeks and bent head used to act as an irritant upon her, and she would insist upon a passage being made for her.

"This is my room as much as yours," she would say, "it's not right for any one to block it up. *I* never do."

"But there's nowhere else to sit," poor Dolly would say.

"Write your silly things on the dressing-table, then," Miss Weenie would suggest.

Dolly could not explain to her how it was growing impossible for her to write well anywhere except on that ancient wash-stand.

"I've let you go past four times," she would say, "and I will *not* move again. I believe you come up just on purpose. What do you want out of your drawer now?"

"Never you mind. Are you going to get up?"

"No, I am *not*," and Dolly would sit hard on her chair and put her feet against the wall to brace her-

self. And Weenie would push and struggle to get past, and try to tilt the chair.

And sometimes Dolly won and wrote on victorious, while Weenie climbed the bed.

And sometimes Weenie won, and Dolly was jammed helplessly up against her table, and a heroine had to wait in the middle of an impassioned speech, while Weenie leisurely extricated a pair of gloves, or a catapult, or a box of chocolates from the drawer.

Clif and Ted at last took pity on the literary pair, and, as a joint Christmas present, built them a little wooden room at the end of the verandah.

The girls were delighted, and indeed all the house took interest in seeing them establish themselves in the tiny place when the carpenters pronounced the long-awaited word, "Finished."

They set to work and papered the walls themselves, and even Ted, who at first had been quite annoyed at the idea of his carpentering being covered up, was forced to admit that the æsthetic covering of green marguerites was an improvement. True, Richie, who had too fine an eye, pointed out the vexatious facts that some of the widths had the flowers upside down, that there were blisters and bubbles in places, that one or two pieces showed a tendency to curl away from the wall, but no one else was hypercritical. The room was about seven feet square, so there was space for no furniture beyond a little table and a chair each. The chairs stood back to back, touching each other, so

that if one writer in the throes of an idea that would not reduce itself to words, moved restlessly, the other was forced to protest. On the walls, hanging book-shelves held every volume the girls possessed; and like most of the shelves that depend from a cord, these had an irritating knack of occasionally tilting forward, or sloping sideways, and showering their contents on the owners' heads. Photographs, little pictures, and nick-nacks filled every available corner; under each table was a little waste-paper basket; on each table a tiny ink-bottle and fancy pen—Richie's gifts—a vase of flowers, sixpenny statuettes of Milton and Shakespeare, a photograph or two, a penwiper, a stamp-sponge, a doll's saucer filled with paper fasteners.

"Now we *can* write," said the girls, and they set out neat little stacks of paper, and dipped their new gilt pens into the new ink, and held their elbows well to their sides as they wrote, lest they should disturb any of the pretty decorations on their tables.

There was a window in the room, a tiny affair that remained from an old greenhouse, and while the room was new the family used to be always going along the verandah on tip-toe and peeping at the would-be authoresses.

But Ted came into the dining-room one evening when the room was a couple of months old. "Look here," he said, "I don't believe those little monkeys

do a thing but talk and fix up the pictures and things in there. A lot of good it is to them."

"Dolly was writing down in the orchard to-day," volunteered Freddie.

"Phyl's scribbling in her bedroom now," Richie said.

Clif and Ted went up-stairs two steps at a time to see, and there was Phyl writing by a candle in her room, and Dolly, her washing-stand in a glorious muddle, her arms spread out, covering paper at a surprising pace in hers.

"Well, you're nice ones," said the discomfited carpenters. "Why aren't you in your study?"

The girls looked very much ashamed of themselves.

"I was only just finishing something in a hurry," Dolly said.

Phyl gathered her papers together, and picked up her candle.

"I'm just going down," she said guiltily.

But Freddie reported them again next day.

"That Dolly was writing in the garden again on her knee," he said, "and Phyl hasn't been in the room all day."

Again the carpenters demanded the reason, and again the girls made lame excuses, and hastened away to sit there forthwith.

But gradually the dapper little study fell into disuse, except when the makers were about, when the

girls, afraid of hurting feelings, and being told that they did not know their own minds, used to make a point of going and sitting there.

"It's because you bump my chair so, Dolly," Phyl said irritably, one evening when they had been fairly driven into the place by the indignant carpenters. "I'm sure I could write here if you would only sit still."

Dolly sighed. "If only I could spread my arms out," she said, "I'd give anything to have a great big table to write on."

"I believe it's the walls," Phyl said in a whisper; "don't they seem to press down on you when they're so near?"

Richie poked his head in the door at this point, and looked searchingly and suspiciously at each girl's table.

"Thought so," he said offendedly, "using your dirty old ink-bottles, both of you, and red pens. Just wait till I give you Christmas-boxes again! Don't believe you ever use the ones I gave you."

"I forgot to fill mine," Phyl said.

"My nib wanted changing," said Dolly; "I'll use yours again to-morrow, Richie." But she sighed; it *was* such comfort to use a plain pen, and have a great fat bottle of ink to dip into.

Ted came and looked at them gloomily. "Freddie says you're always writing in the orchard, Dolly," he said; "what's the good of a study to you? I'll make an aviary of it for the Mater."

"I'm getting so that I can only write out of doors," Dolly said.

"Well, why doesn't Phyl stay in?" Ted demanded.

Phyl cast about for an excuse; then she told one of the truths.

"It—it's really a bit draughty, Ted, these windy days," she said apologetically. And indeed she owed several colds to the winds that whistled beneath and round the ill-fitting door and the window.

"You could easily hang something over them," said Ted, "you're so fond of draping everything."

"And—and it really has a musty smell sometimes," Phyl added, driven to bay. "See—there's blue mould coming in patches everywhere on the walls from the last rains, our books are getting quite spoiled."

Ted sniffed and peered about. "I don't notice anything," he said; "but of course there's no accounting for finicky girls like you."

"If they burnt coffee in the room they wouldn't notice it," Richie said; "that's what old Adams always does after our chemistry."

"Oh, go away," said Phyl, exasperated, "we're frightfully busy; everything has to be with the printer to-morrow, and there are Answers to Correspondents, and Fashions, and an editorial, and some poems to do yet."

Richie and Ted melted away after a little more carping, and the harassed editors fell to work again.

CHAPTER XXIII

ENTIRELY EDITORIAL

THEIR little paper had met with a fair amount of success, but they had both grown thin with the worry of it.

The printer of their School Magazine had undertaken to print and publish this new one for twenty-five pounds a month. He was interested in the little venture, and really gave the editors thicker paper, better type, and handsomer headlines than he could afford for the sum. They would easily get advertisements to pay his charge, he told them, and the circulation would pay themselves.

The girls engaged canvassers for the very necessary advertisements, and that is the reason they began to grow so thin. The first two men undertook the work on commission, but came back after some time with the sad news that no one seemed to want to advertise, and that it would not pay them to work for commission only. In fear and trembling the editors engaged one of them at the alarming salary of ten shillings a

week, and a commission of so much per cent. The man drew his ten shillings a week for a month, and found one pound's worth of advertisements; that did not answer at all.

Then a very energetic man came along who only wanted commission, and said he could get any amount of people to advertise. In a week he filled three pages of the paper, and the two breathed freely again. They sent him out at the end of the month to collect the moneys due, and then came a frightful blow,—he quietly absconded with the full purse.

They almost gave in after that; yet how could they allow the expenses of that first issue to fall on the doctor?

The printer suggested that they should go and get advertisements for themselves; lots of ladies did, he said. He himself gave them a list of City men likely (he judged by their kind hearts) to advertise.

It was the only course left; even the doctor and Mrs. Wise could think of no other way to pay for that first issue, and allow a second one to make its appearance. So there came a summer's day when two trembling girls in white muslin dresses and sailor hats went forth and assailed the big insurances offices, and the busy agents of various patent cocoas, and soaps and perfumes.

When they finally knocked for admittance at the inner glass doors, no manager ever dreamed how long they had been outside the great building, hesitating,

trying to screw up their courage, walking up the steps, assailed with fears and descending again, finally biting their lips and forcing themselves to walk in.

The clerks did not take them for canvassers, they looked too youthful, and they had no difficulty in gaining the private room.

"And what can I do for you?" a manager would say, at a loss to think what two nervous-looking girls could want with them.

Then Phyl or Dolly, for they took the speaking strictly in turn—

"This is our paper, Mr. Jamieson prints it; the circulation is a thousand; will you advertise in it?—it is a pound for one month, but less for a year."

They were never met with anything but the greatest kindness and courtesy, even when they intruded, as they must sometimes have done, on mail-days, and other busy hours. The manager used to take the little paper and look it through in an interested fashion, asking questions as he turned the leaves. And it was very seldom the advertisement was refused; the biggest office in Sydney had taken one whole page for a year; this example and a kindly feeling for the young editors led nearly every manager to take a certain space and to ask to be put down as a yearly subscriber.

The finances of the paper were for two or three months in a flourishing condition, and after all ex-

"'This is our paper: the circulation is a thousand; will you advertise in it?'"

penses were paid there were from six to ten pounds each month to divide between the editors.

What keen pleasure then to buy pretty things for the home and pay Weenie's and Freddie's school bills, and clothe themselves, and have spare money for books and music, and little presents for the mother!

But after a very few months their repugnance for the work became too strong for them.

"I can't do it again," Phyl said vehemently, when after a long afternoon she and Dolly came home just in time for dinner.

"If we never get another penny, if the paper goes altogether, I won't ask for another advertisement," Dolly said, and she flung the little paper with its severe classical title and stilted motto right to the other end of the room.

"Hello!" said the doctor; "a strike of editors, eh?"

"It's hateful!" repeated Phyl.

No one has been rough to you, have they?" said the mother quickly.

"I'd rather they had," Dolly said. "It's really *horrid*, mother. I'm sure they don't think the advertising will do them any good—they all just give them out of kindness. We hate kindness."

"There's an ungrateful pair for you," the doctor said, but he patted Phyl's shoulders so sympathetically that both girls burst out at last with an excited,

almost tearful account of the hatefulness of the work. They had bottled it up between them until now, for one of their mother's earliest teachings had been to make the best of things and not to whine.

That was almost the end of the little paper. The girls maintained their resolution; rather than bring out one more issue under the existing circumstances they would go and be governesses on some bush station, or send Mary away and do all the work of the house themselves; earn money in some way they must, for they could not bear the thought of being a burden on the doctor.

Then the printer, seeing the advertisements were well started, offered to take the paper for his property, and pay the editors a joint salary of five pounds a month.

They accepted thankfully and fell to work again with fresh spirits to fill the twenty-eight pages of letterpress that was required monthly.

Sometimes they received outside contributions to help them in the task; the undergraduates whom Ted brought home for tennis on the chip court he and Clif had made, sometimes dropped into poetry or prose for them; once or twice when columns gaped hungrily the girls had begged from them various prize essays, and then the classic pages had held, side by side with an article on "How to Renovate a Drawing-room for Five Pounds," or "Cookery Chats for Young Housewives," "The Effect of the

Renaissance on the Theology of the Period," or "The Architecture of Cheops and Cephrenes."

But there were many months when they had no help at all, and then they had fourteen pages each of assorted matter, signed by a number of different names, to furnish.

That was what was the matter with the tempers of both of them this same evening when the carpenters had driven them into the cribbed study and then wasted time in carping at them.

On top of the book-case was the pile of finished matter. The ninth and tenth chapters of Phyl's serial were there—"The Master of Malbrook Court." There were quotations at the head of both chapters, a couple from Browning, one from Tennyson. The prose too was broken up in several parts with verses; when the heroine, for instance, went to the piano and sang *For Ever and For Ever*—the words of all the verses were given, and never did the hero grow agitated or impassioned, but he flung a few lines of Whitman or Heine, or whatever last poet the authoress had been reading, at the head of the person to whom he was speaking.

There was also Dolly's serial, likewise full of quotations and similar in style, except that she did not attempt to work out the intricate plots in which Phyl revelled, but occupied herself chiefly in piling as much pathos as she could possibly manage upon every page.

Then there was Dolly's children's page ready, and

for this she generally let pathos alone, and scribbled off in half-an-hour a little tale, in which occasionally Freddie's latest prank or some of their own home fun figured. Then there were poems, two each, signed either with the *nom-de-plumes* of "Fleur-de-lis" or "Wild Hyacinth," "Robert Bernard Wycherly" or "Rupert Grey."

Dolly delighted in such forms as the Villanelle, the Rondeau redouble, the dainty Triolet, and Phyl wrote in the strain of a still more diluted Lewis Morris.

"It's your month to do the Home Article," Phyl said, looking up from her own more congenial task of a paper on the blind poet, Philip Bourke Marston.

"I know," groaned Dolly.

"And you'll really have to be more careful this time," the elder editor said. "Alice Ellerton told me her mother laughed like anything at your 'How to Furnish a Girl's Sitting-room for Three Pounds."

"Laughed!" said the writer anxiously, "why there wasn't anything wrong."

"Yes, there was,—you said, 'First operate upon your inartistic walls, which I dare say are covered with some ugly wall-paper. Now nothing is easier than to enamel them all over with a delicate hedge-sparrow green.'"

"Well," contended Dolly, "and what is wrong with that? Enamelling *is* easy. Look at the way I enamelled that little table in the drawing-room."

"Yes," said Phyl, "but you didn't say anything

about taking the old wall-paper off first, and you didn't allow any of your three pounds for it. Mrs. Ellerton says a tin would only do about two yards, and it's a shilling a tin, so it would cost a frightful lot, pounds and pounds."

Dolly looked discomfited,—then she revived a little.

"It's not worse than the time you wrote 'How to Furnish a House on £100 for a Newly Married Couple,' and only left two pounds for all the kitchen and laundry," she said.

Phyl went on writing. When she finished Marston, she seized a Cookery Book and hastily made up an article on "Over the Kitchen Fire."

"We'll have to do Answers to Correspondents between us," said Dolly, "there's a whole page, and we must fill it."

No correspondents ever wrote and asked a question of any sort, but the editors would not have considered it possible for a Magazine to be produced without such a page, so they were obliged to make it up, with the help of an Encyclopædia.

Some of this month's answers ran like this—

Ximenes.—The quotation you ask for is from Browning, "The Last Ride together." Lest you should not have the book at hand, we give you the context. Here followed twenty favourite lines.

Forget-me-not.—(1) We are sorry to hear your hair is coming out. Have you tried ammonia for it? Wash

it once a week, and do not use curling-tongs. (2) The books you refer to are *Alton Locke* and the *Essays of Elia*. (3) No.

Constant Reader.—

> "Where but to think is to be full of sorrows,
> And leaden-eyed despairs."

From Keats' *Ode to Nightingale.*

Titus.—(1) The most highly salaried of her Majesty's Ministers is the Lord High Chancellor, the Right Hon. Lord Halsbury, who receives £10,000 per annum. (2) A Kreutzer is worth very little—five are equal to a penny in our coinage. Thanks for your kind wishes; it is very pleasant to receive so appreciative a letter as yours.

Portia.—(1) Fur, passementerie, and various braids will be used as trimming. (2) Cover it with pale pink chiffon. (3) *Jacta est alea*, "The die is cast." *Pace tua*, "With your consent." Questions requiring answers in these columns should be in our hands quite six days before publication.

Ignoramus.—(1) Chopin, as if spelt Shopain, the last syllable pronounced as the word "bread" in French; Goethe—Gerter. (2) March 14, 1872, was a Thursday.

Literary Puzzled One.—(*a*) You must not take Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* too seriously. (*b*) No; many prefer not to regard "The Raven" as emblematic of drink. Read "Annabel Lee,"—will not this verse tempt you?

" I was a child and she was a child
In this kingdom by the sea,
And we loved with a love that was more than love,
I and my Annabel Lee;
With a love that the winged seraphs of heaven
Coveted her and me."

Harduppe.—Yes, you can have this paper posted free to you for a year if you send us three yearly subscribers. Thanks for kind wishes.

" Oh," said Dolly, " you'll really have to do something about Mervyn's hair, Phyl. You know there really was a letter, this month." She reached it out of the pigeon-hole that was marked—" Answers to Correspondents," and that always stood empty.

In the first chapter of " The Master of Malbrook Court," Phyl had said that " the morning sunshine streamed into the room and turned to burnished gold the sunny hair of Mervyn Malbrook." And alas! in the seventh she had written, " Overcome with anguish Mervyn bowed her dusky head upon her hands and gave herself up to a fit of bitter weeping."

An anonymous correspondent, possibly one of those undergraduates, wrote to point out the mistake.

" Lover of Truth," wrote Phyl now, on that correspondence column. " We sorrowfully note the discrepancy you speak of. Mervyn's tresses have certainly changed in some mysterious way during the course of seven months from gold to raven. We

had hitherto had rather a high opinion of the young person's character. but now we feel reluctantly compelled to admit she must have been of a designing nature and had some hair dye or Peerless Gloss among her toilet appliances."

CHAPTER XXIV

NEWS FROM THE FATHERLAND

"With laughing mouth but tear-wet eye."

THERE came a day when Phyl and Dolly dashed in from the Post-office with scarlet faces. There had been among the letters one with a queer German stamp upon it, and, secure in a deserted road, they had raced each other home as if they had still been in short frocks.

The news spread round the house, and the family gathered rapidly together from orchard, garden, and verandahs, for this was the boy's first letter since his feet had touched on German soil.

In the hall impish Davey lingered with wistful eyes to catch a word or two, and out in the kitchen Mary said, "Bless the little chap!" and looked affectionately at a patch of ink he had one time spilt on her spotless dresser.

"*Wiesbaden,*
"*Jan. the something or other.*

"HELLO THE ALL OF YOU" (*the letter ran*),

"And how's things out there? I expect you are all roasting. Well, I'm not, and that's a fact. Cold! Why, if I put my nose outside this morning it would never come in again, the wind snaps so, and I'd have a beard of icicles and a snow moustache in five jiffys. Did you get my other letter? I posted two of them at places we stopped at, I forgot the blessed names,—oh! one of them was in the Sandwich Islands, I remember that, because a fellow stuffed me there were natural sandwiches there growing on the Bread-fruit Palms. I never get taken in now though; you can't help it at first, everything's so queer. Then I posted again—only I didn't put a stamp on, at the place we left the ship,—I forget the name, but it's in Italy. You got it, didn't you? Old Ollendorf's a rummy fellow; we went to a town called Rome (it's in Italy too, not far from that other town), and he poked about all day among the smashed-up places. He gets tears in his eyes and blows his nose hard whenever he gets excited, and he gets excited over everything. Well, the more smashed-up a place was the more he'd cry. While we were in that town he was crying most of the time. I got tired of it, so I left him saying 'Ach Gott' and 'Himmel' and such things in front of a lot of dirty old pictures, and young Clinch and me went to a circus. Mein vord, it

was a circus. They'd kick such a thing out of Australia, but anything does for these old Rome people.

"Well, then, we went to another place, I forget the name—oh, Florence, I think. Didn't think much of it, but it's not quite so tumble-down as the what's-it's-

"We went to a town called Rome."

name town. Oh, I didn't tell you about the river at the other place. Old Olly had spouted about it, the Tiber it's called, all the way in the train, and I really thought I was going to see something at last. Well, when we'd had something to eat, he carted me out on to a bridge to look at it. I give you my word I

thought he was having a lark with me. The dirtiest, miserablest bit of a river you ever saw. I didn't want to catch typhoid, so I held my nose and turned round to see if he was holding his. But he wasn't. He was blowing it hard and crying. Yes, by Shimminy. I told him he just ought to see our Hawkesbury.

"Well, about Florence. It's got a lot of buildings and things in it, and some of them look rather nice; they're higher too than the buildings in Sydney. Clinch and me got sick of mooning about with Olly, and there was one of the waiters, a real good sort, going to a place five miles off to see some races, so you bet we went too. But the horses were as smashed-up as the buildings are—not a goer in the lot, so it wasn't much fun. Australia could put them up to a thing or two on racing, my word.

"I get awfully sick of only hearing this blessed German talked. We've settled down in this town now for three months, and even the slaveys here jabber it. Young Clinch is only eight, but I feel I can talk to him all day and all night just because he doesn't jabber—jabber. I'm getting pretty smart at it myself though; you have to, or go hungry here, they're such a blessed set of idiots. You don't know how I wanted some bull's-eyes one day, and do you think I could make any of the thick heads in three shops understand? They all kept telling me to go to the butcher's. When I come back I'll have to get three pounds of them straight off to make up.

"Aunt Helene's awfully queer; she's as old as anything you know, and yet she's always doing lessons and things. I go for a walk with her every day, and she makes me do the jabber, and does it herself all the time, so sometimes I don't talk much. But *she* does,—all the questions and answers in the Conversation-book, and I know she goes into the shops and buys things just so she can ask for them in German.

"Yesterday it was such a lark; we were mooning up and down the street and a horse backed on to the pavement, and she bolted into the first shop,—she's the nervousest woman I ever saw,—bar those little donkeys Phyl and Dolly. Well, she likes to be dignified too, so when the shop-walker johnnie came up to her she pretended she'd just come in to buy something. Well, every time she speaks to any one, this is her regular jabber, only I'm saying it in English, the other stuff is too hard to spell. 'Guten morgen' (that means good-morning). 'It is a cold wind. Winter draws near. It freezes. It has frozen last night.' The shop-walker johnnie says, 'Ja, es ist schönes wetter' (that means, yes, it is very fine weather)—of course he doesn't understand what she has been saying. Then he says, 'Be seated, Frau' (once she got her hair off and said, 'Frau*lein*, gefalligst').

"Then she says, 'Show me, if you please,—she's got that part very pat,—das gloves, des ribbons, dem lace,

or whatever she wants. Only this was a man's shop, and there were only shirts and trousers or things about. Well, I thought I'd help her out of a hole; I knew she didn't want anything at a shop like that, but I thought she wouldn't like to go out without buying something after bolting in like she did. So I told her she'd better get me some trousers, I wanted some. Well, she got so red I thought she must have forgotten the word for them, so I pointed to some tweed stuff on the counter, and then pointed at my legs, and a man at a counter understood in a jiffy, and began to get some down. But Aunt turned round and walked out of the shop, and I had to follow, of course, and the shop-people must have thought we were cracked. What do you think it was? It wasn't that she'd forgotten the word for trousers, but I know now she'd have rather died than have said it. 'Never refer to such horrible things in a mixed assembly, Alfred,' she said. I'm always treading on her corns, but how on earth was I to know *trousers* weren't proper?

"She's as finicky as that over everything; after I've been in her room for an hour I just rush out on the hill and shout, and howl, and roll about, you get so bottled up. She's not much to look at, her hair's any colour, and her eyes are lightish blue, and she always looks as ill as anything. She's not a bit like that likeness of mother. She's always getting new dresses, really spiffing ones, all silk things with roses

and flowers worked all over them, and lace things and everything; jolly greedy of her never to have sent mother any.

"This is what we do all day. Well, we're not at a hotel now, Grandfather's tired of them; this is a private sort of a house in the suburbs, only you pay them for keeping you. Well, every one gets up at six except Grandfather, and we have some sort of meal—you can't call it breakfast. There's no cloth, only a table and a box of sugar on it, and a tray full of hot rolls and a big pot of coffee. We just go and help ourselves, and then Aunt Helene settles down and plays the hideousest and hardest things on the piano for two mortal hours, and I moon round the garden and lark with the fellow who cleans the boots, an awfully nice fellow. Then I hear her saying in her squeaky, proper little voice, 'To me if you please the young Herr Alfred send, Elizabeth.' And sometimes the young Herr Alfred hides so he can't be sent, but sometimes he goes, she looks so lonely plugging along up the hill by herself. Well, we lug along for about an hour, and plug into churches and lug into ruins and plug along the river,—it's called the Rhine. And then we plug back, and now we've come to an agreement that if I jabber going, she talks English coming back. So coming back I talk the most; only she doesn't seem to like to hear about all of you, so I can't think of much to say.

"Then when you get in there's another meal, about

ten—you can't call this breakfast either, no porridge or eggs or anything decent, only fruit and little cakes and stupid things. Grandfather is up then, and we go out in an old rattle-your-bones for miles and see things. Then there's mittagessen when you get back —that's dinner. It's not so bad 'cause you needn't eat just what they do. They have raw ham and raw smoked fish stuffed with vegetables, raw herrings and salad. There's soup and meat and proper things like we have, but in between the meat courses the slaveys hand round some mad thing like pancakes or ices. Sometimes they have pigeons or partridges, and then they hand round an ass of a dish of boiled apricots or plums, and the Germaners, not us, you bet, take some on their plate with the game, and put lettuce on that, and oil and sugar on that, and then fall to and eat it. We all have a salt-cellar each, but they don't put spoons in them, you're expected to help yourself with your knife. Do you remember dropping on to me for that, old mother?—I can see just where I was sitting at the table; Dolly was dreaming away over her meat and wouldn't pass the salt, and I leaned across her to get some on my knife. It was haricot mutton for dinner, I remember, and there was Queen's Pudding after, and Phyl served it and gave me the pyramid piece of icing, and Freddie got tears in his eyes because he wanted it. I hate them having things to eat here like we did at home; there was a big sago pudding the other day,

and it made me feel as funny as anything to look at it, you all seemed so far away.

"Old mother, don't you think if I get on fast and learn everything I could come back soon? I keep remembering what the Pater said, but it makes you feel pretty sick to think you've got to stop here for always. There's a man coming here from to-morrow to give me lessons, and I'm not going to play any larks on him or anything. I'm just going to do Latin and any mortal thing he sticks on to me. I'll know an awful lot in a year, old mother, if I work like that, and I'd soon get a good billet in Sydney, specially now I know German talk. Get him to let me come back, mother; what's the good of tin to you when you don't want to spend it?

"Your affectionate son,

"ALF."

Letters followed from week to week.

"*Jan.* 19, *Strasburg.*

"DEAR MOTHER,

"We came to this town for a few days; there's rather a good clock here, it would interest you. Grandfather isn't well. He's rather a little man, and his nose is a bit like a hook, and he gets gout. I don't like him much. He's always asking you the past participle of *pouvoir*, and saying just when you're enjoying your pudding, and don't want all

the table to look at you, 'Dative plural of a sharp weapon?'

"I think he gives Aunt Helene a pretty bad time; he's always jumping on her, and sometimes he tells her she couldn't get married because no one would have her with such a temper as she's got. She never says anything back, I don't believe she's got a temper at all, and she's jolly nice to him and looks after him like anything. I believe she'd like to get married to Vollmar—he's the chap that's started to teach me music; he wouldn't have her of course, he's as young and nice as anything, and he's gone on young Clinch's governess, they're stopping near us in Wiesbaden. When he comes for my lessons she dresses herself up like anything and keeps coming in the room, and sometimes she drops books so that he has to pick them up, and once she pretended she was fainting, and he had to hold her up, and he looked as if he didn't like it. Wish she would get married—that would be one lot of money less to wait here for.

"I'm getting on like anything, mother. I heard Grandfather say yesterday, 'And what do you think of your pupil's capabilities, Herr Oppenheim?' And old Opp Beir,—he's a decent old boy—said, 'Cababeelitays,—ach, ya, he brogress along with dem first glass.' And I really am getting on, mother, I never grafted like this before. I asked Grandfather to let me learn shorthand, and he was quite pleased, and said it would

be very useful if he decided to let me have any active share in the firm. Was it mean of me, old mother? He lets me learn anything, and I couldn't tell him I wanted to learn so that I could get a billet in Sydney. Don't you think if I cram very hard all June I could come back? I wouldn't be any expense to the Pater now; I know music and whips of things I usen't to, and I could easily get something to do, and p'raps help to pay Freddie's school bills. Dear old mother, do let me,—honour bright, I've tried like anything not to want to come back, but it's pretty awful. If you see a girl go running down the street and her hair's brown you can't help thinking of Weenie. Sometimes just flowers make you feel sick; there's some here in the garden, and they're jonquils like those old Clif brought home for you that day, and I never go to that part of the garden.

"Your loving old ALF."

"*Same old Veesbaden, March* 30.

"DARLING OLD MOTHER, AND ALL OF YOU,

"Grandfather's better again, but Aunt Helene is pretty ill. She never goes walks now, but lies on the sofa nearly all the time. She likes me to talk to her and tell her about my lessons, especially my music. The doctor said to Grandfather last week she ought to go for a sea-voyage, and said, 'Take a run to Australia.' My scrimmy, I couldn't help turning straight head over heels, and I made an awful row,

and Grandfather swore like anything. Then the doctor said if we came straight away now she'd escape the rest of the cold weather here, and I nearly turned over again. Oh, my scrimmy, think of seeing you all in a month or two! Grandfather growled like anything, he doesn't seem to think any one but himself ought to be ill, and he said he was very comfortable where he was, and he wasn't going to lay himself open to sea-sickness. And so I told him there was a fellow when we came out, and he used to put cotton-wool in his ears and wear smoked glasses, and pretend hard to himself for three days that he was right away up country, and he was never sick at all hardly. And Grandfather gave a roar at me and said, 'Clear out.' You never know where to take that chap. I laid for the doctor, he's a very nice fellow, and I told him I thought Aunt ought to go the voyage at once; she hardly ate anything at dinner, and there was roast quales and things. And I told him I'd look after her like anything if Grandfather liked to stop behind. I went round with him in his buggy to all his places, and he talked and was as nice as anything; he said he'd like to see Phyl and Dolly writing in that room old Clif and Ted built; and I'd got that photo of Weenie up a tree in my pocket that old Ted took, and he said she looked like the little youthful maiden Hiney wrote about. Hiney's a poet that lives somewhere out here, I think, you often hear people talking about him. Well, the

old brick said he'd try to persuade Grandfather to come, he said the voyage would do him good too. He's a real Briton, that man, although he's made in Germany. I'll keep letting you know things as fast as I find them out.

CHAPTER XXV

THE TRIALS OF WEENIE

WEENIE was fourteen before Romance in any way affected her.

True she had occasionally been bitten with a desire to emulate her sisters, and the results had been so unique that Mrs. Wise had carried them off and placed them in her "put-away" drawer, an honour she rarely bestowed on the prolific elder sisters.

There was the time for instance that Phyl and Dolly had written a play which they had acted among themselves with much success. The doctor was much amused one day while rehearsals were still going on to come across Weenie sitting in the summer-house, biting her pen very hard.

"No, I protest," he said; "look here, two authoresses are enough in the family. For Heaven's sake don't you catch the disease."

"I don't see why they should be the only ones to write," Weenie said; "it's ever so easy; I'm always going to do it."

"Mother!" cried the doctor. Mrs. Wise was sewing just outside on the grass. "Here's Weenie with the most alarming symptoms setting in."

"Oh, let it alone, if you love me, Weenie," Mrs. Wise said. "I *do* want one daughter who won't burn the jam, and seam up four sides of a pillow-case."

"Two authoresses are enough in the family."

"You don't make fun of the others," Weenie said pettishly; "why don't you tell them to stop?"

"Their complaint has become chronic," the doctor said, "but we should like to save you while there is time."

From the bottom of the garden came loud excited shouts and hurrahs.

"I do believe," said Weenie, her face lighting up, her pen dropping from her hands—"I do believe Freddie's got that snake at last," and her long, black legs went flying down the orchard.

"Freddie, the physician, warranted to cure," said the doctor.

Of course he had to read the forgotten result of so much pen-biting.

"*The Rival Suitors*," by Wilhelmina Conway, said sprawling red letters at the top of a sheet of foolscap. Then just underneath—

"DRAMMATIS PERSONS

LORD REGGINALD.—	a lord in love with Susan.
ADOLFUS.—	Another man, but he's really the real Lord Regginald.
MRS. JONES.—	Adolfusse's Mother.
SUSAN.—	A girl.

ACT I. SCENE I.

A drawing room of the Castel

Enter SUSAN (*attired in a blue sash and things*).

"Well, I always thought you were a murderer, Lord Regginald, and now I know you are."

Exit SUSAN.

Act II. Scene I.

Enter Adolfus.—But what this character had to say did not appear, as the young dramatist was just wrestling with his speech when the doctor had interrupted her.

Then there was the time that Weenie kept a diary.

Dolly and Phyl kept them, it goes without saying, but no one ever saw theirs, they kept them so carefully hidden away. Weenie's of course flung about the house everywhere, and every one considered it "fair game." The boys had many a shriek of laughter over it after she had gone to bed. The doctor made her a present of a proper Letts's Diary with three days on each page, when he found she so ardently desired to do as Phyl and Dolly did. It cost Weenie real hard thinking, however, to find sufficient occurrences in ordinary daily life to fill the spaces for the one fortnight during which she wrote up the entries every night.

This was one of the mildest sheets that Clif read aloud one night.

"*Monday.*—Got up. Porridge, hot scones and marmerlade for breakfast. Agnes and Lottie Green always have butter as well as marmerlade, we can only have one. Went to school. Wore my brown dress. Got my sums wrong. Came home. Won

three connies off Freddie, only he would only give me two. Played cricket, bowled Dolly out first shot. Had dinner—mutton and things. Did lessons—went to bed.

"*Tues.*—Got up. Had a row with Dolly. She will sit on the chair and try to stop me coming in the room. Went after a snake with Richie going to school but we lost him. Had lunch,—mutton sandwiches, apple pasty and cake—only Phyl had made it and it wasn't much good. Agnes and Lottie's mother gives them sixpence each and they get the loveliest things, tarts and buns and things. Wish we were rich. Got a hole in my stocking,—well, I couldent help it so Phyl needent have grumbled so. There aren't *any* places to kneel down when you're playing marbles without stones.

"*Wed.*—Curry and potatoes and cauliflower and sago pudding and rhubarb pudding for dinner. Yesterday at Lottie and Agnes' house they had roast ducks and peas and asparrowgas and jellies and French pudding with whiped cream. Won Dolly again, tipped her chair right up. Went to school. Didn't get kept in to-day at least only half-an-hour."

When Weenie at last discovered her precious diary had been in the unhallowed hands of the boys, and that all the family had been laughing at it, her wrath knew no bounds.

Dolly and Phyl had been among the laughers—she directed her anger against them.

"All right," she said, "just you wait. I'll get *your* diaries and let the boys laugh at *them*. I'm sure you put far sillier things in yours."

"I haven't a single doubt of it," said Clif.

"Well, laugh at *them*," said Weenie; "every one laughs at me, 'tisn't fair."

One evening she came bursting into the dining-room where the boys were with a closely-written diary page in her hand.

"Said I'd get it," she screamed triumphantly; "such fun; just listen, boys."

"Don't be a little sneak," Clif said, "you know Dolly wouldn't like it."

"Pooh," said Weenie, "she laughed at mine. *I* didn't like it."

"You're only a kid," Clif said.

"Go on, let's hear," said Richie, "it's quite fair—they laughed like anything over Weenie's."

"*Jan. 24th:*" read Weenie. "Fifteen to-day, fifteen long years gone over my head. Sometimes I ask myself what use I am in the world, and I cannot help answering, not one bit. But from to-day I really will try to do better. I will earnestly try to conquer my temper, to be more patient with Weenie and the boys, and to help mother better.

"*Jan. 25th.*—Weenie is really the most aggravating little wretch in the world; no one could be patient and live long with her. But I will *not* give up my chair at the wash-stand."

But here Dolly burst into the room, snatched the page away, called Weenie dishonourable, mean, and other epithets.

"Now, I won't help you with your essay," she said as she went out of the door again.

Weenie, the essay on her mind, wished she had let well alone.

"You help, will you, Clif?" she said.

"Not I," said Clif, "I told you, you were a little sneak."

Weenie's young, brown face flamed with sudden passion.

"It's always the way," she said, "you're always against *me*, all of you—if it had been Dolly or Phyl—mother's the same, and doctor—t-t-think I don't n-n-notice, don't you?"

She flung away out of the room and went rushing blindly down the orchard before the boys, startled at the suddenness of her outbreak, could speak.

"What a little spit-fire!" Clif said; then settled comfortably down to his pipe again.

He was very fond of these three little step-sisters of his, but he never even attempted to understand the vagaries of such queer little beings. To "girls' ways" he and the other boys always used to put everything down that they could not understand, and this sudden flaring of Weenie's was, he supposed, one of the "ways."

But Weenie, unknown to every one, with her four-

teenth birthday, and the lengthened frocks her long legs demanded, had gotten to herself a brand-new trouble that she hugged daily to keep warm. She had taken it into her head that she was unappreciated by her family, misunderstood, uncared for.

When she went to bed at night she used to lie and conjure up a pathetic scene of her death-bed, when too late her family had learned her worth. She would lie and blink at the patch of light made on the ceiling by Dolly's wash-stand candle, her throat swelling with self-pity. She saw a picture of herself growing daily thinner and thinner, her cheeks white, the eyes unnaturally large and bright. Yet all the family went on with its own occupations, too engrossed to notice her failing strength. And one by one her duties would be given up, meal after meal and only her vacant chair would be at the table. And at last it would be forced upon them all that the patient figure upon the sofa, with the transparent hands and ethereal smile, was slipping from their midst. She went further still one night, and actually buried herself in an oak and silver coffin, piled up with wreaths and crosses of fragrant flowers. Her family and all her school-fellows were standing around looking their last on her as she lay, her face marble white and peaceful, her still white hands filled with lilies, and crossed on her breast. A sob rose from the bed at this heartrending picture.

"Whatever's the matter?" Dolly said from the wash-stand.

There came another quivering breath.

Dolly dropped her pen and ran round to the bedside.

"Have you got a pain?—does your head ache?—what *is* the matter, Weenie?" she said, quite startled; "would you like me to fetch mother?"

Weenie shook her head languidly and turned her head tearfully aside.

"Go a-w-way," she said.

But Dolly was not to be put off like that. She stroked the brown curls on the pillow, she put loving arms round her, and kissed her healthy brown cheek soothingly.

"Do tell me," she said; "are you in a row at school? Tell me, little old Weenie; isn't it anything I can help?—poor old Wee, there, never mind, nothing can be very bad—there, tell me, girlie dear."

But Weenie turned away irritably. It was too bad to have one's burial interrupted in this fashion. Besides, it was vexatious to have Dolly kind; to be in keeping with her mood the elder sister should have bidden her harshly "be quiet," or at least have scorned and reviled her for her tears. She buried her nose in the pillow.

"I wish you'd let me alone," she said peevishly, and Dolly was forced to retire.

The keynote of all the trouble was, the child was missing Alf, and without his invigorating companionship was forced to enter into the curious and quieter paths of girlhood that her feet had avoided so long.

CHAPTER XXVI

MORE LETTERS

ONE week's mail brought seven separate letters from the "German Sausage Land." It had evidently been a safety-valve for the excited lad to actually seal and post a letter every day, although he was aware the mail service between his longed-for native land and the "wretched foreign hole" where he sojourned would not put itself out of the way to deliver them in any hurry.

Mrs. Wise opened the budget and placed them in serial form, for Alf had at last after earnest entreaty fallen into the habit of putting the date and the name of his abiding city at the head of his letters.

"*Wiesbaden*,
"*May 7th* (ran the first).

"Are you listening, all of you? Well, if you can't understand take the letter up to an asylum and they'll explain it. I'm just as mad as mad, and so would you be. I'm nearly dead sure we're coming. Grandfather said first she could go across

the river to Homburg and she could drink some water there and that would cure her, but she fainted again this morning and she looked jolly bad, I can tell you, and he said he'd see.

"My scrimmy, haven't I just had a day of it! First of all I cut down to the shops to get you all a present each, I'd got a sovereign to spend.

"I got heaps of things with it,—pincushions and thimbles and books for the girls and a big drum for Freddie and a collidescope affair, and some jolly good marbles for Weenie and some chocolate for her and a pipe for the Pater and a knife for Weenie. Well, it took me nearly all day plugging down to the shops and lugging home the parcels. Then there was supper but you bet I didn't want any. I just cut upstairs and packed up everything. It took me nearly all night; it was jolly hard to make everything go in and the drum takes up a lot of room. It's one o'clock now and I've just finished. I won't be able to have a bath in the morning, I've packed my shirts and things in the bath-tub thing that's like a portmanto, and they haven't got a bath-room in this house.

"Do you remember I said I'd never bathe in a scrimmagy mean little bath like that when you bought it? but you're jolly glad to; whips of the places where we stop they haven't got any bath-room. Won't I have a fine old splash when I get home! I've got my travelling suit on and I'm not going to get undressed at all, so I'll be ready to start in the

morning,—you never know when you'll have to start. As soon as I wake—only I shall never go to sleep—I'm going up to the doctor's to ask him to read in the shipping what day a ship goes from Hamburg. They have such lunatic papers here you can't read for yourself and there are only women here, and they don't understand ships.

"ALF THE MAD."

"*Same old place.*
"*Next day.*

"Hurresh, hurresh, hurresh! Ach! Gott! Himmel! (it's not wicked to say those words here, even the ladies do). Himmel! Gott! Ach! Ach! There's a boat goes on Thursday. The doctor wasn't up when I got there, it was only half-past five, but I woke the coachman and he told me. It's the *Friederich der Grosse.* Ach! ach! Gott! I'm nearly off my head. I'm going to pack up again to-day, it'll make the time go, and I squashed things up a bit when I was hurrying last night. Then to-morrow we'll be in the train, and next day off. Tra-la-la, tra-la-la, Hurresh!!

"ALF THE MADDER."

"*Wednesday.*

"DEAR MOTHER,

"Everything's up. I don't care what happens now. I'd just as soon die as anything. Grandfather said we'd go to the concert, and I couldn't help going

in my brown suit,—it would have taken an awful time to unpack another, and he said why, and I said I'd packed the others up, and he was beastly horrid and snapped me up like anything and said he had no intention of going at all; he says we'll go to that miserable Italy instead. I'm going up to the doctor's to-night to try to set him on to him but I know it'll be no go,—I'll just have to go on stopping here always. I can't believe it was only yesterday I was packing up that drum and things and now none of you'll get them. It was such a stunning pipe too. Oh mother I'll *have* to come home,—oh I can't go on stopping here,—oh won't you please write by next mail to Grandfather and say you can't spare me any longer. Please don't write,—cabel, I *can't* wait mother dear.

"ALF."

"*Thursday.*

"DEAR OLD PHILLIPENA,

"Thank goodness Aunt's getting worse so we may come after all. Of course I don't mean I'm glad she's worse but I know she won't be any good till she's had the voyage.

"I told you she was in love with Volly; well I never thought about it and yesterday when we were out I told her that young Clinch's governess and him were going to be married next month—young Clinch told me so it's quite true. Anyroads he wouldn't have thought of marrying any one like Aunt; young

Clinch's governess is an A oner, I'm in love with her myself. Well I'd a nice time of it. Aunt began to faint and cry and go in hysterics all over the place. The buggy had taken us up the river and the man had taken the horse out for a drink so there was only me, and I had to fan her and throw water on her and everything. She got alright pretty soon and going home she gave me ten shillings and told me not to tell young Clinch she'd been crying, she said she was crying because the little gray castle and the river were so beautiful. But I know better. I told her the best thing would be for her to come straight to Australia and she'd soon forget him and praps get married to someone else; there are whips of men on board ship and they all flirt with somebody. She got in an awful wax with me and wouldn't say anything else all the way home.

"ALF."

"*Same old dirty place,*
"*Friday.*

"DEAR MOTHER,

"I went and bought a new toothbrush and a collar and a hairbrush to day, I just *can't* unpack those bags again, I know if I do we'll never come. I'm wearing my brown suit all the time but no one has noticed. I don't think after all Aunt Helene could have been gone on Volly; when I was having my lesson she came in dressed fit to kill you, and

she'd made her cheeks all red with dye or something, —my goodness she did look a fright. And she shook hands and congratulated him like anything and he told her all about Miss Allison, he's quite mad about her. He kept walking up and down and running his hand through his hair while he talked. He said they were going to live in a little brown house near the river and that as the gods of music and love and youth would be under the roof it wouldn't matter if they had nothing to eat, and a lot more rot. I don't think he has any money scarcely, 'cause young Clinch says his mother keeps begging Miss Allison not to get married till he's got more pupils, but a girl like that doesn't care about a man's money and they're going to be turned off on the second. Aunt was jolly nice to him I can tell you and he talked to her as if she was his mother. Then after my lesson I went out with her and she bought awfully gummy little chairs and tables and pictures and books and even a piano and sent them round to the house they're going to live in. And she met Miss Allison and said she'd sent a little thing or two, 'An old maid's privilege,' she said. My jimminy, she is getting changed; she'd have had a fit if any one had called her an old maid a bit ago. But I must have been no end of an ass to think she was sweet on Volly; she'd be scratching Miss Allison's eyes out instead of sending her wedding presents.

"ALF."

"*Saturday.*

"DEAR MOTHER,

"The awfullest thing has happened. Aunt's quite dead. She got her palpitations again last night, but she went to bed as usual, and when we got up she was dead. I keep thinking I'm dreaming it all, only I know I'm not because I've got her canary in here and she liked it better than anything and always had it in her room. She brought it in to me last night when I was in bed and she said she'd give it to me if I'd promise and swear never to forget to feed it. She said it woke her up too early in a morning so she had to give it away. And she brought her sewing things in, and she'd written 'Little Dick' on about six bits of calico and she made me let her sew them into all my coats so when I put one on in a morning I couldn't help seeing it on the lining and remembering to give it its water and food. I had to unpack my things to get the coats out, but I'm glad now I did. I wish I'd done more things for her, and oh I do wish young Clinch and me hadn't laughed at her when she talked German. I'd talk it now to *her* till my tongue fell out if it would do any good. The doctor was here an awful time and people keep coming all the time now. Grandfather doesn't seem to care very much; he's just sitting in his usual chair in the salon, and he's just looking straight out the window all the time, and he's drank an awful lot of brandy. The

doctor says he's going to get him to go to Egypt, he says someone must look after him and at Alexandrea there's Aunt Helene's cousin and she's married to a clergyman there, only he's dead and she could look after him.

"It's pretty awful mother to think you've been horrid when she's dead. I used to hide often when she wanted to go out, and it was lonely for her plugging down to the river alone. And she used to want me to practise my things for Vollmar and I wouldn't and she'd give me shillings and half-crowns if I would. And I used to be always laughing over her German,—it makes me feel pretty sick to night to think how beastly I've been. Fraulein Schliessman made me go in and look at her, and she looks the littlest whitest thing, and her hair isn't curled, it's only just lying quiet and straight on the pillow and she only looks as if she was very fast asleep, only they've put so many flowers all over her you can't help knowing she's dead. I took little Dick in and let him touch her hand, I knew she'd like it and the little chap wasn't a bit afraid and picked a violet out of her hand. Oh mother I wish some of you were here; it's awful to go to bed and think of her being left in her room and no one with her just because she's dead. It's the next room to mine and I feel all the time I can see how quietly she's lying and I can smell the flowers.

"ALF."

That was the last of the packet of letters, and then mail after mail came in and no envelopes with the black round writing on it came to that quiet Australian suburb after long tossing on the great deep. Week after week Phyl and Dolly, Weenie or the boys went up the long hill to the Post-office, one after another sometimes to make quite sure a letter had not been overlooked, to worry the postmistress, to "just see if there was one sticking to the back of the pigeon-hole," or "to please look if there wasn't a German letter mixed up with the newspapers."

Silence, silence, week after week, and all their hearts aching miserably for the poor little homesick lad. Silence, silence. He was in Alexandria now, they told themselves, and pictured him happier, for the cousin had a family of boys. The girls read up all they knew about the Nile and about that particular town, but they could not comfort themselves by imagining him interested in the stupendous age of the place; they knew he would compare the Nile with the Hawkesbury, greatly to the detriment of the former. Phyl almost always went to sleep with wet eyes induced by a mental picture of Alf's solid, lonely little figure standing solitary against the great Pyramid. Silence, silence!

CHAPTER XXVII

FINANCE AND FASHION

"'Two added to one, if that could be done,'
It said, 'with one's fingers and thumbs,'
Recollecting with tears how in earlier years
It had taken no pains with its sums.''

"REALLY, this *is* tiresome," said Mrs. Wise; "I asked Dolly to make a plum-pudding, as Mary was so busy, and she has put currants and sugar and eggs and peel and suet, and no flour or bread-crumbs at all. Where is she, Phyl?"

"Four and four and sevenpence-halfpenny, four and elevenpence-halfpenny, minus threepence for stamps," said Phyl, waving a financial pen to excuse immediate reply; "gone to the post, I think, mither dear; she's mad after a letter, though I don't know why. Oh, these wretched accounts *won't* come right."

"Here, I suppose I'll have to lend a hand," said Clif, from the lounge where he was stretched smoking and reading, for the afternoon was the pleasant, leisure one of Saturday.

He made a lazy way across the room to where

Phyl, housekeeper for the week, was wrestling with the accounts. She and Dolly were supposed to take the management of the house alternate weeks for necessary domestic education.

"Look," said Phyl, "I have got everything down quite plainly,—just run your eye down that column, Clif, and see what you make."

"Which column?" said Clif, taking a sheet covered with hieroglyphics and rough writing.

"Don't tease," Phyl said. "It's quite plain, Clif; there, the middle one,—oh, it goes over that side too, and just add on those items in the left-hand corner, I had forgotten them before. I'm eight and ninepence short somehow."

"How much did you start with?" Clif said, and made a really heroic effort to disentangle the confusion.

"Oh, that's on the right-hand side," Phyl said. "There was the ordinary four pounds for the bills, and then four and eightpence extra because Mary forgot to pay the baker's bill and gave it back to me, and one and six Ted had borrowed, and minus two shillings mother took out for Freddie's shoes mending, —oh, but she gave me a shilling of it back, so put plus a shilling more, Clif."

"Whoa—steady!" said Clif, figuring away,—"never mind 'minusing'—just give me your assets."

He found the total came to £4 5*s.* 8*d.* "Now for the items of expenditure," he said, and attacked the wild sheet.

"Butcher, twelve and nine," said Phyl's statement. Then in brackets against this was the note ["but it really is only eleven and eight, because chops were ordered on Monday, not steak"]. "Baker, four and two, and four and eight from last week. Greengrocer, five and ninepence halfpenny, and a shilling for bananas from a boy at the door on Friday, and fourpence for Freddie to get water-melon for his lunch; total therefore for greengrocer, *6s.* 1½*d.*"

"Well, there's a shilling wrong there, my beautiful girl," Clif said, making the correction; and Phyl wrote on a scrap of paper with relief, "Only *7s.* 8½*d.* short."

Wages, Milk, Butter, Ice, Grocer,—Clif unravelled their totals from the mass of notes and set them down in a column. "I get it to make four pounds three and twopence," he said.

He compared it with Phyl's total which said, "Four pounds four and twopence minus sixpence Richie borrowed and two shillings deposit on Weenie's railway-ticket and two and six of my own money because the iceman had no change and I borrowed sixpence from the Fines Box for a poor man at the door. Therefore, total is four pounds four and eight, and owing still to me is two and six, and owing to the Fines Box sixpence."

No wonder Phyl looked harassed.

"You see," she said, "I ought to have one and sixpence change; that's plain, isn't it?"

"I've seen plainer things," said Clif.

"Oh," she said, "I know you think it is a stupid way to do accounts, but I get all wrong if I do them any other way. It's as clear as anything to me."

Clif expressed admiration for the brain power that could penetrate such a remarkable labyrinth, but Phyl took no notice.

"I ought to have one and six over," she repeated; "and instead of that I'm seven shillings and eightpence-halfpenny short . . . I've not paid the butter, and there's my own halfcrown, and sixpence to be returned to the Red Box."

"Where's your purse?" Clif said, and Phyl produced the bulky housekeeping money-holder. There were receipts in it, little lists of "Wanteds" from the grocer, a poem or two cut out from magazines, and a review or two of their own little paper, now dead from want of funds. Clif passed these over and searched the middle compartment that contained four stamps, two shirt-buttons, sixpence, and the butter bill wrapped up with four and sixpence inside it. Phyl pounced joyfully on this. "I'd forgotten I'd paid that," she said. "I missed the man on Monday, and wrapped it up, and then must have paid out of that sovereign. Oh, it'll come out right now."

Clif calculated rapidly again.

"We've got about two and tenpence too much now," he said, and the wrestling began again.

"Well, may I speak now?" said Mrs. Wise, who had

gone on sewing while the statement of accounts was involving undivided attention.

Phyl leaned back and gave her mother an impulsive kiss. "What a patient little woman it is!" she said; "sometimes, Clif, when all of you are away she has a dreadful time of it. I know she is often dying to tell us something, but when she sees we are writing she bottles it all up and tip-toes away again."

"And then I forget," said Mrs. Wise plaintively. "I'll have to invest in a phonograph, for sometimes it is a most interesting and important thing I have wanted to say."

"We do let you talk at lunch," Phyl said kindly; "at least, almost always."

Mrs. Wise said the amendment was necessary. "They drag their characters to table with them sometimes, Clif," she said, "and I eat my tomato-toast or scrambled egg to the accompaniment of a discussion as to whether chloral would kill instantly and painlessly; or if snake poison, injected hypodermically, would be a surer and swifter death."

"Poor old mother!" Clif said. "There you are, Phyllida, my Phyllida,—one and six to the good. It's always the way, Mater; she has the right change every time, but how she gets it beats me."

Phyl thankfully put all her papers and boxes away. "My beautiful youth," she said, "this is nothing to the elaborate system we used to pursue when we were small. Do you remember, mother, when you first gave

us an allowance of two shillings a week each, and we had to buy all our little things out of it?"

"I do," said Mrs. Wise, and ran a tuck with smiling recollection. "How many match-boxes used you to have each?"

"Seven, I think," said Phyl thoughtfully. "Let me see: there were gloves, handkerchiefs, stockings, hair-ribbons, charity, pocket-money, and books. We used to apportion our income into twopences and four-pences, with the exception of hair-ribbons, for which we only laid aside one penny a week. Gloves were half-a-crown for best ones and a shilling for school ones, and, oh dear! how long it took to accumulate enough in twopences to buy a pair! We should have considered it a reckless and dishonest proceeding to apply stocking-money to glove purposes; and as to buying a hair-ribbon with the twopences that were lying waiting a charity call—why, we would almost as soon have stolen the money from your purse, mother."

Mrs. Wise was regarding her daughter critically. "I think some money needs stealing from my purse at present," she said. "Are you bankrupt, Phyl, that you are wearing that old blue serge this afternoon?"

Phyl coloured a little.

"It really takes too long to be always changing your dress," she said; "once a day is quite enough, I think, unless one is going out. Anything more is vanity."

Mrs. Wise's eyes were still busy. Phyl's collar was

almost carefully awry ; her hair, upon which she usually bestowed a good deal of attention, was done up in any fashion. The mother remembered too seeing Dolly go out also in her plain morning frock, and without any of the little prettinesses of which both girls were so fond.

Phyl coloured again under the quiet scrutiny. "Well, really, mother, it's all very well for girls who have nothing else to do to make themselves look nice," she said, "but it is too much waste of time when one has work to do."

Then Clif laughed out—a great roar of laughter. "Don't you see what it is, Mater," he said ; "it's the trail of Miss Phillipson. These little donkeys think because they too waste good ink, they ought to look slovenly, and pitchfork their clothes on them like that sweet creature does."

Then Mrs. Wise looked enlightened and also very determined. The girls had become acquainted with a woman journalist, a clever, really excellent woman, but one entirely devoid of any personal vanity. Ted said he was convinced she only did her hair once a month, used her hat for a pillow, and fashioned her dresses out of old bagging. Phyl and Dolly, full of admiration for her powers, suddenly felt themselves conceited little butterflies to be so fond of pretty, fresh muslins and chiffon daintinesses and well-fitting shoes and gloves. They began to think it necessary to live up to their profession, and hence that careless collar and unchanged frock.

But the mother nipped the weakness ruthlessly, and for so gentle a woman was quite scathing. The daintiest, most particular of her sex herself, she had absolutely no tolerance for untidy, slip-shod women; it was quite a creed with her that every girl should make the best of her appearance, and that too little thought for clothes was even worse than too much. The very poorest, she used to say, in these days of cheap prints and materials, need never be other than fresh and neat.

"You may march yourself straight up-stairs, my lady," she said, "and do your hair again, and put on your pink blouse, and see your collar meets exactly and precisely under your chin. And when Dolly comes in she may do just the same. If I see any more of this, I shall treat you as if you were in pinafores, and dress you myself."

Phyl retired. Her mother in that attitude was not to be gainsaid, and there was no doubt the fit and delicate tint of the pink cambric blouse afforded her vanquished spirit some consolation as she put it on.

She did her hair in the more elaborate fashion, brushed every speck of dust from her skirt, and descended again.

"I don't a bit like to own it,' she said, "but I must say I feel sprucer, body and soul, than I did before. I believe, after all, one would begin to think and act in a slip-shod fashion if one dressed slip-shoddily."

Mrs. Wise smiled approval. "I am convinced no woman ever committed suicide," she said, "just after a cold bath, or while she was wearing a freshly-got-up blouse—especially if it was of really pretty material."

"Whoa there! Here's copy going to waste," said Clif. "Where's your note-book, Phillipina? 'Clean Boiled Clothes as a Preventive of Crime.' There's a subject made to your hand. Any suggestions to offer as to material, Mater? Would you say, for instance, muslin would ward off Melancholia, or calico Kleptomania?"

Mrs. Wise laughed. "I can give you a headline, though, for the article," she said, "and from our wise old Wendell Holmes. 'Dowdyism is clearly an expression of imperfect vitality; the highest fashion is intensely alive.'"

Phyl chuckled. "Then I shall invest in green leather shoes and green Suède gloves," she said. "I saw in a paper they were the dominant note in Paris fashions."

"Here comes Dolichus," said Clif. "Get your breath up, Mater; you'll have to deliver your peroration again; she has the same frock on that she wore at breakfast."

But Dolly was wearing it even when she went to bed, and no one had said her nay.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ONE GLORIOUS HOUR

"So lay that afternoon to sleep
Among your dearest pansy-knots,
The hushed herbarium where you keep
Your heart's forget-me-nots."

DOWNHILL for a space, then over a feeble creek, and springing steeply up again ran the green road that branched off from the red and more important one of the lonely suburb, and once past the doctor's house narrowed into a bush-track that lost itself over the hill.

Perhaps half-a-dozen people traversed it in a day, for all patients, visitors, and tradespeople used the straighter road that led to the side of the house.

A fence ran along either side of the wide, green road, guarding property which was wild bush at present, but might some day have a value. And bracken and wild grass crept from beneath the two rail barriers and boldly made a springing place of the road itself. Rarely was buggy or cart so reckless of its internal economy as to make a way across the

ruts and tree-stumps, so the blue vine clambered at will over the stumps and flung delicate tendrils and flower-smothered loops to catch the feet.

Dolly was coming down this road while Phyl's personal appearance was under criticism. In her hand she grasped something white very, very tightly. She was running almost all the time, stumbling over the ruts, caught in the creepers. On, on she came, with a face where the scarlet colours ebbed and flowed in the strangest way—on, on, over the shallow little stream where Freddie gave the bull-frogs no peace. Up, up the green rise—bursting in at the gate, and leaving it welcomely open for the grateful, vagrant cow. Up a green bank and recklessly across the flower-beds,—the circling drive was impossible—then up the steps and into the hall. Here a loose mat caught her feet, and she found herself on the floor. "Phyl! Phyl!" she called in a breathless voice; and now her fingers went to slit open the white envelope. She did not attempt to get up.

Phyl was in the hall. Clif was there, too, and the mother. At intervals up the staircase occurred Weenie and Freddie and Richie. Ted put his head over the banisters. "What's the row?" he said.

And there, on the floor, was Dolly with a bit of paper in her hand, laughing, choking, crying. She denied the last afterwards, but Freddie declared her eyes were "as red as anything, and as wet as water."

Some one shook her; perhaps it was Phyl, incredulous that Dolly could have a secret that she had not shared.

Richie's voice was heard urging her to "stop being a little donkey;" and Dolly made a wild effort after the control of her lips and voice.

"I've—I've—I've——" she said, and excitement grasped her throat again, and she merely laughed and choked. Some one shook her again. "I've—written a b—book," she said, thus urged.

Some one snatched the paper from her, half-a-dozen heads tried to crowd round and read it at the same time. A most business-like epistle it was, with the printed name of a well-known publisher at the top, and a cable address, and other important things about it. And, "Dear Madam," it said,—such was Dolly's excitement the very "Madam" appealed to her as the most exquisitely humorous thing in the world.

"DEAR MADAM,

"The MS. you submitted I have read in due course. With the terrible general depression in trade just now, I am exercising my powers as agent very sparingly, preferring to send all MS. to London for the consideration of the firm there. But from your communication I take it you desire to negotiate for publication of your story without delay. If you will acquaint me with your views as to what

value you place on your work I will write you further in the matter.

"Faithfully yours,

"JAMES LEDMAN."

"Pooh!" said Richie, disappointedly. "There's nothing there to make a fuss about."

Even Clif said something about counting chickens too soon, and advised Dolly to put her head under the tap to keep it cool till the "further" letter came.

"It's not refused," said Dolly with a deep breath, "that's all I care about."

Weenie looked on deprecatingly. "Will it be a really truly book with covers on and everything?" she said. She only extended a kindly contempt to the little magazine.

"Of course it will," said Dolly, and rose from the floor and sat down on a hall-chair as befitted her new dignity.

"I wouldn't put your name on it, then," said Weenie; "people would laugh like anything at a scrap of a girl like you writing a book."

"Oh, mother!" said Dolly, "you would put your name, wouldn't you? At first I was going to put 'White Heather' or 'Hyacinth,' like we did in the paper, but the name looked *so* nice."

"Certainly put your name," said Mrs. Wise, who was reading the letter over and over again with cheeks quite pink with pleasure and pride.

Weenie on the staircase laughed shrilly. "Oh, she can't, mother," she said. "Dolly Conway, Dolly Conway,—why, it sounds as silly as anything. Look how different Charles Dickens and Emma Jane Worboise and Charlotte Yonge sound! Dolly's isn't a proper-sounding name."

"I put 'Dorothy R. Conway,'" Dolly said. "I think it sounds as right as anything—doesn't it, Phyl? Oh, I can see it quite plainly—in little gold letters, and written slantingly. Oh, I do hope they won't print it straight—and not red covers or blue. I *must* have that lovely sage-green—on brown Russian leather, Phyl, like the little Tennyson. Oh, I *must* have it in Russian leather. I think I'll write at once."

"I don't like Dorothy R.," objected Clif, "it's got a Yankee sound,—Silas H. Wiggins, Hiram T. Moneybags."

But Dolly's ear found Dorothy Conway too plain, and Dorothy Rankin Conway too important, so she clung to the intermediate R.

"But, I say," said Richie the practical, "how much shall you get? He asked you to tell how much."

"Yes," said Dolly, "we'll have to think of that. How much should you say, mother?"

But Mrs. Wise was as ignorant as any of them as to book values. "How long did it take you to write it?" she said. "You might arrive at an idea of its value to you in that way."

Dolly tried to calculate. "I began it on my birth-

day," she said. "I felt I would try to do something big that day. Then every day I kept writing a little at it for ever so many weeks,—about eight. And then it got hard, and I *couldn't* do it, and it all seemed stupid, and I threw it behind the piano, and it stayed there for long enough. And then, one day, I was dusting the room, and I knocked Alf's portrait over, and it fell behind too, so Davey and I had to pull the piano out, and I found the story, and it all seemed easy to go on with, and I finished it in about a week."

"Say two months, then," said Mrs. Wise.

Dolly calculated again. "We got two pound ten a month each from the paper, and that took all our time. Do you think it would be too much to ask five pounds?"

"Oh, I think you ought to get more than that, surely," said Mrs. Wise. "Five pounds is very little. I think large sums are paid for books."

"Five pounds!" ejaculated Freddie. "I say, Dolly, the cricket-ball is awful burst, you wouldn't miss two and six out of five pounds."

"Well, suppose I say *ten* pounds," said Dolly, looking round questioningly; "perhaps it wouldn't be too much. Ten pounds, and a copy each all round. I oughtn't to have to buy my own book."

"Look here," Clif said, "he wouldn't have bothered to ask you what value you put on it if he did not think it pretty good. I'd ask a cool fifty; he is sure to beat you down, so perhaps you'll get twenty-five in the end."

"Twenty-five pounds!" Dolly said, her eyes lustrous. "Oh, but, Clif, I'm sure covers cost a lot; I don't think they'd be able to pay twenty-five pounds to me after the covers and printing and everything."

Ted, who had disappeared for a time, now came back with several magazines in his hand.

"I read an article in one of these about the prices authoresses get," he said; "perhaps we can get an idea this way."

It was Phyl who found the exact paper and the exact article; she read out the items in a voice whose excitement increased as she went along.

"Mrs. Humphrey Ward for *Robert Elsmere*, £10,000. Marie Corelli's income is in the thousands, and Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett is said to have realized about £10,000 from *Little Lord Fauntleroy*."

Incoherent screams of astonishment and unbelief met these statements. Phyl went on to say that wise authors never sold their books outright, but had a royalty on each copy; that Olive Schreiner had omitted to insist upon this, and had received the sum of £12 only for her *African Farm*, though some years later, after its enormous success, her publishers gave her a royalty."

Dolly's head was swimming. "I think I'll write at once," she said; "come on, Phyl," and she hurried off to the little study.

Phyl was rather quiet though she helped in the

preparations, pushed aside Richie's useless inkstand, and placed a substantial one in its place.

Dolly's arms closed round her. "Was I horrid?" she said. "Phyl, Phyl, are you vexed? Oh, Phyl!"

Phyl's soft lips quivered a little. "Oh, no," she said.

Dolly's arms clung tighter. "Oh, don't," she said, "please, don't, I was going to tell you—oh, lots of times, but I thought you'd say I was conceited, thinking I could write a *book*. So I thought I'd finish it and send it first. But when I got the letter, all the way from the post, I wouldn't open it, because I wanted you to be there."

Phyl looked mollified, and gave Dolly a sudden kiss.

"It's all right, it was only at first I minded, but you know I'm gladder about it than I could ever say. I'm so glad that I can't think of anything else." All sorts of loving praise she gave. Dolly squeezed her arm; there was moisture in her eyes at the generous words, her mouth was unsteady.

"But how anxious, Dolly,—how *very* anxious you must have been all the time," she said.

Dolly's eyes looked out of the window to where an orange sun flamed to its death. Overhead and all around the sky was suffused with colour,—the very east burned gold and red of delicate shades, and turned the edges of its clouds rosy, and the shadows of them purple. Up very high in the broad blue hung the half moon.

When the girl spoke the hush of the dying day seemed to have crept into her voice. "No, I wasn't," she said, "someway I *knew* it was going to be." Then as Phyl's eyes widened she tried to tell her something, struggled, kept silence, tried again; such talk came easy to neither, but deep currents were stirred to-day.

"Knew?" repeated Phyl.

"One night," Dolly said, in the same low tone, "I felt I must do *something*. I felt I couldn't just go on doing little things always,—staying at home and helping, and going to dances, and playing tennis. I used to think I should like to go as a missionary,—not to China, of course, only somewhere here where people were very poor and miserable. But that night I didn't seem to want anything but to write books that people would love to read, and that might do them some good."

"Well?" said Phyl, for Dolly had paused, and was looking with glowing eyes at the happy sky.

"I just prayed, Phyl. It seemed so simple. God had said all things were possible to faith,—that we were to Ask, and we should Receive, that *all things whatsoever* we should ask in prayer, believing, we should receive. He didn't say we were to stop to consider if the thing we asked seemed impossible. He just said *all things whatsoever*. And I prayed, Phyl, that I might write books. All my life seemed to go in the prayer. And everything was—wonderful. I was

kneeling by the window, and the sky seemed to bend down all round me, it was so warm and close. We have never known just what it is to have an own Father, Phyl, but I knew that night. And I prayed and prayed, and I *knew* He was answering me. Oh, Phyl, if you could have seen the stars,—so large and kind!"

Phyl's face was very soft and sweet.

"When mother was so ill, I prayed—just like that," she said, "and I went to sleep *knowing* she would grow well."

"This is only a little tiny book, of course," Dolly said; "but it is the beginning of the answer. I shall write the others yet. Oh, Phyl, all my heart seems singing thanks."

The laughing sunset sky had quietened as they talked, and the sweet gravity of early evening was stealing over it. From the garden the voices that had seemed music and part of the sunset when far away, came closer, and now, hearty and unsoftened, brought the girls back to earth.

Dolly pushed back her hair, and picked up a pen.

"You must write a book now, Phyl," she said.

"I'll start this very week," said Phyl. And she did, and in due course a flattering letter of acceptance came, and nearly all the excitement was repeated.

But this afternoon there was only the first book of the family in their thoughts.

Dolly, after about ten different attempts, had her reply ready for the publisher—

J. LEDMAN, ESQ.

"DEAR SIR (she wrote),

"The value I place upon the copyright of my story, *The Sins of Six*, is £200. I also desire to have a royalty on every copy. I hope you will let the book have artistic covers; I much dislike red or bright blue, and shall be glad if you will let me have either white parchment covers, with red lettering and rough edges, or dull green Russian leather, with the name across it in careless gold lettering.

"Faithfully yours,

"DOROTHY R. CONWAY.

"P.S.—I hope you will let me have twelve copies for myself."

"That's the very least number I could do with," she said, as she laid down her pen; "there are ten of us, and I know every one, even Freddie, will demand a separate copy, so that only leaves two for outsiders."

A loud noise of pummelling on the door was heard, so they went out.

Somebody said the family had been so overwhelmed with surprise, it had not, it feared, paid due honours to its authoress, and was anxious to make amends. Whereupon Weenie planted on Dolly's head a

wreath hastily made of nasturtiums and honeysuckle; and Clif and Ted, with a cushion on their crossed hands, carried her for an extremely jolting and triumphal march round the drive and down the orchard and back.

They dropped her in a heap on the lawn.

Carried her for a triumphal march.

"Here's hoping you won't think it necessary to bring a book out every day," Clif said, and mopped his streaming forehead.

"I want to know, as soon as any one can spare me any attention, what the book is about," said Mrs. Wise, packing up the tea-things that were on the grass.

"Oh, it's not much," said Dolly candidly.

"I suppose that means it is one of your children's stories," said Mrs. Wise.

"Yes," said Dolly, and there was a faint shadow of regret in her eyes.

Ted sat upright again. He had pretended to be bowed down to the ground with trembling fear about the subject.

"It just struck me it might be *Elvira and Alphonso* in three books of forty-nine cantos each," he said.

"Or *The Spirits of the Nether World*," said Clif. This wildly watery version of *Paradise Lost*, and a certain Spanish tragedy, impossibly long, were standing jokes in the house, yet the one shade on Dolly's intense happiness that afternoon was the fact that it was not one of these ambitious efforts that was to see the light of print; she had a very small opinion herself of the children's stories she scribbled so easily.

Freddie was round at Dolly's elbow, assiduously offering her the sugar—which she never took—and pointing out the piece of cake which was richest in currants.

"Tommie Edwards at our school got a whole set for his birthday,—the bat and stumps and bails as well as the ball, Dolly," he said.

CHAPTER XXIX

AND THEN NO MORE

"Transportation for life was the sentence it gave,
And *then* to be fined forty pounds."

TED'S chuckle over the inference Freddie left for Dolly to draw from his remark gave place suddenly to an indignant shout.

A boy with a large parcel had just entered the gate, and had actually had the temerity to approach the house in the way Dolly had done, regardless of flower-borders. At the moment of Ted's shout he was setting a desecrating foot recklessly down upon the pansy-bed that was the pride of the house.

Ted disentangled himself from the wiles of Weenie, who had occupied herself by chaining him to a garden-seat with trails of wild clematis.

"I'll knock the good-for-nothing little beggar's head off," he said, and took a tempestuous step in the direction of the impertinent lad.

But Phyl was before him. One great gasp and choking cry she gave, then she broke away from the

tea-ring, rushed madly across the grass and flower-beds, and to the incredulous astonishment of the family fell upon the boy and his parcel and began to hug him in a way marvellous to behold.

Up rose the family to investigate. And lo! it too found itself rushing madly over the well-ordered

Rushed madly across the flower-beds.

pansy and primrose retreats, and also falling upon the parcel-carrying youth and hugging him.

Freddie was the first to recover himself.

"I'll be undoing the parcel, Alf," he said, "I'd like just to have a look at my drum."

Then Alf laughed. He had been crying like a baby on his step-mother's shoulder until now.

"That's all the luggage I brought, the rest's on the ship," he said, and pulled the brown paper off his parcel.

"Chirrup, chirrup!" said the fat little yellow bird, and sang at the sweet sun that the dark paper had hidden away.

"Get some water, Weenie, and a bit of green; all the voyage I couldn't get any green," said Alf.

In through the gate came the doctor's bicycle, and once again the pansies suffered from the wild impetuosity of humans. Nobody in the least believed their eyes, but each waited for the other to discredit the apparition.

"Oh, I know we're dreaming," said Dolly; "in a minute we'll all wake up."

"Oh, will we!" said Weenie contentedly. There had been no standing-room for her in the general rush, and she had fallen on the grass, and was still sitting there embracing the wanderer's legs.

"If we do wake up," said Alf, and there was a note of almost hysterical gladness in his voice, "I'll take a dose of your prussic acid, father."

The father's arm was round his little son's shoulder; he knew that nothing—no gold or promise of fame—could ever make him willingly let the lad go again.

"You shall stop at home now,—there, old fellow,

you shall never go back again," he said from time to time, and little Alf continued to blubber happily.

"Just don't ask me anything yet," he said in a low tone to his father; "just be as if I've only come in from school, will you?"

And Dr. Wise, recognizing the state of tension the lad was in, forbade a single question being put to him.

But after dinner—there was Queen's pudding, and the pyramid of icing did not go to Freddie—he pulled himself together and told his story.

After he had written that last of his letters to his family and told of his aunt's sudden death, a strange thing had happened. He found at the bottom of the bird-seed tin, which she had delivered into his hands with so many injunctions, a sealed note.

"Here it is," he said, and with a blurring of eyes took out gently from his waistcoat pocket the short letter written in the stiff, would-be German hand that had become part of herself.

The family read it silently, one after the other.

"LITTLE BOY," it said—

"When I feel ill as I do to-night my eyes grow clear-sighted. This is no place for you, here with a soured old man and a sourer old maid; you would have grown to far healthier manhood across the sea in that merry family that I have never let you talk about just as much as you wanted. But is it

too late? I think you know the way back. I was not blind to the looks you cast at Hamburg and Bremen on the boats that happened to have Sydney for their destination. Suppose you break away from us and make your way back to them all, little Alf? There are times in the lives of many of us when breaking away from a life that stifles the good in us is a necessary as well as a brave thing to do. I was too weak always and have stayed here warping all my life.

"I am putting four ten-pound notes with this; they will carry you across the water again if you have the courage to fling the big fortune you would have had to the winds. You have no ties here; grandfather is too old and lives too much to himself to care for you; I would far rather spare you than keep you and watch you grow hard and money-fond like us.

"Think of it, little Alf; your mother, my own sister that I played dolls with, makes no softening feeling in me at all now when I think of her. I made myself feel hard to her, years ago, and now when I should like to change and would give the world to feel a natural gush of love for her, I can wake no emotion at all; that is my punishment, for the heart will not be trifled with.

"But you, warm from the hearts of all those sisters and brothers—oh, go back to them and be poor and happy, and grow up in the healthy atmosphere of

'give and take' instead of our most wretched one of 'keep.'

"Little Alf, who has been the kindest, tenderest, most patient laddie all these months, spare sometimes a loving thought to

"YOUR AUNT HELENE."

"But I wasn't what she says at the end," Alf said in a choking voice; "I've been a beast to her,—think how I used to make fun of her in my letters!"

But they who knew warm-hearted little Alf knew without telling just in what way he had been a comfort to the lonely, mistaken woman.

"Pater," the boy said wistfully when the general conversation was loud, and the doctor so near he could hear a whisper, "I won't be very much expense, —are you very vexed with me for chucking the money? I came back steerage, so I've got twenty-two pounds left out of the forty. That'll pay for my food for a long time."

But the doctor, who had always been rather an impetuous, improvident man, blew his nose as loudly as Herr Ollendorf was wont to do, and said—

"Hang the expense!" with great vigour. "Thank heaven, I've got you again, old lad," he added; "your punishment is, you'll stop here now, and be poor with the rest of us."

A week later came a German letter. It was from the grandfather's solicitors, and bore strange news. Alf was

his aunt's heir. Everything she had she had left to him unconditionally. Not a very vast inheritance, it is true, for the poor little woman's mania for beautiful clothes had greatly crippled a once handsome income. Still, three hundred a year would do many things, and at least keep away the terrible necessity of Alf being compelled to teach German for a living.

The letter went on to state the fact of the boy's disappearance; inquiries had been made, and it seemed reasonable to conclude he had run away from his grandfather's care, and sailed for Australia by the *Barbarossa*. "If this proved to be the case," said the solicitors, "and if the boy had returned, or in process of time did return to his father, then his grandfather washed his hands of him for all time."

The young reprobate leaned back when the reading of the letter reached this point, and sighed relievedly.

"That's something to be thankful for," he said; "every night I've dreamt he'd sent to get me back."

"I'm afraid it's a stony-hearted laddie," Mrs. Wise said. "I don't at all like to picture to myself that lonely old man."

"But he never cared a dump for me—you ask him; why, he nearly used to get a fit sometimes if I came near him; he said I fidgeted so," Alf said excitedly. "He's precious glad I cleared, I'll bet; he only wanted some one to leave his rubbishy money to; the little mummies can have it, and welcome."

"The who?" said the doctor.

"Oh, those kids in Egypt," said Alfred.

Dolly was in the corner reading the "further" letter from her publisher-elect, and surely there was a smile wrapped up with the kindly note.

"Hello, Dolly looks as if she couldn't help it," said Richie, the speaker of slang.

"O-o-oh!" said Dolly ruefully, "neither I can."

Down had come many of her card-castles; flat on the earth they lay. The publisher would give her a royalty, and a fair one, on every copy, but—

"I cannot entertain paying you such a sum for copyright," he wrote; "you are entirely unknown as a juvenile writer, and your tale is very short. I can only offer you fifteen pounds for that; but should the book succeed as I expect, the royalties will total up no inconsiderable sum each year."

"Fifteen pounds!" repeated Dolly in a disappointed tone. Last night she and Phyl had lain awake spending the two hundred pounds in most magnificent fashion; a trip to Stevenson's Samoa for their mother, themselves, and Alf, being the choicest item on the list.

"Never mind," said Freddie kindly, "I can do without the cricket things now, Dolly—Alf 'll get them for me; won't you, Alf?" and he fondled his millionaire brother's hand with the most respectful affection.

Dolly's eyes went skimming along over the page to the agent's disquisition on "Covers." Russian leather and white parchment with rough edges were

impossible, it seemed. Mr. Ledman wrote at length, and with eloquence, of the beauties of gilt edges, and the chaste and elegant appearance of some appropriate floral emblem on a bright red, blue, or green ground. He said he proposed to include it in the well-known "Bluebell Series," of which they had sold one million copies.

But Dolly was not entirely vanquished. She had carried with her for three long days the dear vision of sage-green Russian leather, severely plain and artistic, and the crude colouring of her shelf of "Bluebell Series" made her shudder. The voyage to the Happy Isles she relinquished with a sigh, and wrote that she accepted the offer of fifteen pounds and a royalty. But she added a most agitated couple of pages whereon she made known her undying hatred of covers of the "Bluebell" description.

The kindly agent soothed her in his next reply; she should not be in the "Bluebell Series," he promised, and she should have the most artistic covers compatible with the fact that the book was for young readers. So she took heart again, and speedily forgot Vailima and the skies she might have seen, rough-edged parchment and everything in the world but the fact that flying forward, forward through the shouting seas was a ship, bearing in its breast that precious parcel of her very own writing, that London magic would turn into a book, a book, a book!

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